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EVERY TUESDAY

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ONE COMPLETE NOVEL

THREE SERIALS

SIX SHORT STORIES

MISCELLANEOUS

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MAGAZINE
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Vol. XIV April 23, 1918. No. 2

The Graven Cryptogram

by Carolyn Wells

Author of "Black Aspens," "Odd Dodd," "The Sunshine Bride," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A CERTAIN DATE.

"WELL, then, go to church; and I hope to goodness you'll come back in a more spiritual frame of mind! Though how you can feel spiritual in that flibbertigibbet dress is more than I know! An actress, indeed! No mummers' masks have ever blotted the scutcheon of my family tree. The Clydes were decent, God-fearing people, and I don't propose, miss, that you shall disgrace the name."

Ursula Pell shook her good-looking gray head and glowered at her pretty niece, who was getting into a comfortable, though not elaborate, motor car.

"I know you didn't propose it, Aunt Ursula," returned the smiling girl. "I thought up the scheme myself, and I decline to let you have the credit of its origin."

"Discredit, you mean." Mrs. Pell sniffed haughtily. "Here's some money for the contribution plate, Iris; see that you put it in, and don't appropriate it yourself."

The slender, aristocratic old hand, half covered by a falling lace frill, dropped a coin into Iris' outheld palm, and the girl perceived it was one cent.

She looked at her aunt in amazement, for Mrs. Pell was a millionaire; then, thinking better of her impulse to voice an indignant protest, Iris got into the car. Immediately she saw a dollar bill on the seat beside her, and she knew that that was for the contribution plate, and that the penny was a joke of her aunt's.

For Ursula Pell had a queer twist in her fertile old brain that made her enjoy the temporary discomfiture of her friends, whenever she was able to bring it about. To see any one chagrined, nonplused, or made suddenly to feel ridiculous, was to Mrs. Pell an occasion of sheer delight.

To do her justice, her whimsical tricks usually ended in the gratification of the victim in some way, as now, when Iris, thinking her aunt had given her a penny for the collection, found the dollar ready for that worthy cause. Such things are irritating, nevertheless, and were particularly so to Iris Clyde, whose sense of humor was of a different trend.

In fact, Iris' whole nature was different from her aunt's, and therein lay most of the difficulties of their living together. And there were difficulties. The erratic, emphatic, dogmatic old lady could not sympathize with the high-strung, high-spirited young girl, and as a result there was more friction than should be in any well-regulated family.

In addition, Mrs. Pell had a decided penchant for practical jokes, than which there is nothing more abominable. But members of Mrs. Pell's household put up with these, because if they didn't they automatically ceased to be members of Mrs. Pell's household.

One member had made this change. A nephew, Winston Bannard, had resented his aunt's gift of a trick cigar, which blew up and sent fine sawdust into his eyes and nose, and her follow-up of a box of perfectos was insufficient to keep him longer in the uncertain atmosphere of her otherwise pleasant country home.

Iris Clyde had announced her intention of leaving the old roof also. Her pretext was that she wanted to become an actress, and that was true; but had Mrs. Pell been more companionable and easy to live with, Iris would have curbed her histrionic ambitions. Nor is it beyond the possibilities that Iris chose the despised profession because she knew it would enrage her aunt to think of a Clyde going into the depths of ignominy which the stage represented to Mrs. Pell.

For Iris Clyde, at twenty-two, had quite as strong a will and inflexible a determination as her aunt at sixty-two; and though they oftenest ran parallel, yet when they crisscrossed, neither was ready to yield the fraction of a point for the sake of peace in the family.

It was after one of their most heated discussions, following a duel of words that flicked with sarcasm and rasped with innuendo, that Iris, cool and pretty in her summer costume, started for church, leaving Mrs. Pell irate and still nervously quivering from her own angry tirade.

Iris smiled and waved the bill at her aunt as the car started, and then suddenly looked aghast and leaned over the side of the car as if she had dropped the dollar. But the car sped on, and Iris waved frantically, pointing to the spot where she had seemed to drop the bill and motioning her aunt to go out there and get it.

This Mrs. Pell promptly did, only to be rewarded by a ringing laugh from Iris and a wave of the bill in the girl's hand as the car slid through the gates and out of sight.

"Silly thing!" grumbled Ursula Pell, returning to the piazza, where she had been sitting. But she smiled at the way her niece had paid her back in her own coin, if a dollar bill can be so considered.

This, then, was the way the members of the Pell household were expected to conduct themselves. Nor was it only the family, but the servants also were frequent butts for the misplaced hilarity of their mistress.

One cook left because of a tiny mouse imprisoned in her workbasket; one first-class gardener couldn't stand a scarecrow made in a ridiculous caricature of himself; and one small scullery maid objected to unexpected and startling "Boos!" from dark corners.

Servants, however, could always be replaced, and so, for that matter, could relatives; for Mrs. Pell had many kinsfolk, and her wealth would prove a strong magnet to most of them.

Indeed, as outsiders often exclaimed, why mind a harmless joke now and then? Which was all very well—for the outsiders; but it is far from pleasant to live in continual expectation of salt in one's tea or cotton in one's croquettes.

So Winston had picked up his law books and sought refuge in the city of New York; and Iris, after a year's further endurance, was thinking seriously of following suit.

And yet Ursula Pell was most kind, generous, and indulgent. Iris had been with her for ten years, and as a child or a very young girl she had not minded her aunt's idiosyncrasy; had, indeed, rather enjoyed the foolish tricks. But of late they had bored her, and their constant recurrence so wore on her nerves that she wanted to go away and order her life for herself. The stage attracted her, though not insistently. She planned to live in "bachelor" apartments with a girl chum who was an artist, and hoped to find congenial occupation of some kind. She rather harped on the actress proposition because it so thoroughly annoyed her aunt; matters between them had now come to such a pass that they teased each other in any and every way possible. This was entirely Mrs. Pell's fault; for if she hadn't had her peculiar trait of practical joking, Iris never would have dreamed of teasing her.

On the whole, they were good friends, and often a few days would pass in perfect harmony by reason of Ursula not being moved by her imp of the perverse to cut up any silly prank. Then, Iris would drink from a glass of water, to find it had been tinctured with asafetida, or brush her hair, and then learn that some drops of glue had been put on the bristles of her hairbrush.

Anger or sulks at these performances were just what Mrs. Pell wanted; so Iris roared with laughter and pretended to think it all very funny, whereupon Mrs. Pell did the sulking, and Iris scored.

So, it was not, perhaps, surprising that the girl concluded to leave her aunt's home and shift for herself. It would, she knew, probably mean disinheritance; but, after all, money is not everything, and as the old lady grew older, her pranks became more and more an intolerable nuisance.

Iris wanted to go out into the world and meet people. The neighbors in the small town of Berrien, where they lived, were uninteresting, and there were few visitors from the outside world. Though less than fifty miles from New York, Iris rarely invited her friends to visit her because of the probability that her aunt would play some absurd trick on them. This had happened so many times, even though Mrs. Pell had promised that it should not happen, that Iris had resolved never to try it again.

The best friends and advisers of the

girl were Mr. Bowen, the rector, and his wife.

The two were also friends of Mrs. Pell, and perhaps out of respect for his cloth the old lady never played tricks on Mr. Bowen, or his worthy spouse. It was their habit to dine every Sunday at Pellbrook, and the occasion was always the pleasantest of the whole week.

The farm was a large one, about a mile from the village, and included old-fashioned orchards and hayfields, as well as more modern greenhouses and gardens. There was a lovely brook, a sunny slope of hillside, and a delightful grove of maples; and, added to these, a long-distance view of hazy hills that made Pellbrook one of the most attractive country places for many miles round.

Ursula Pell sat on her veranda looking at the far-off hills. A slight but persistent hacking cough had kept her from attending church, and she sat quite contentedly gazing over the landscape and thinking about her multitudinous affairs.

"I s'pose I oughtn't to tease that child," she thought, smiling at the recollection. "I don't know what I'd do if she should leave me! Win went, but land! you can't keep a young man down. A girl, now, 's different. I guess I'll take Iris to New York next winter and let her have a little fling. I'll pretend I'm going, and leave her here to keep the house, and then I'll take her, too! She'll be so surprised!"

The old lady's eyes twinkled and she fairly reveled in the joke she should play on her niece. Not to do her an injustice, she meant no harm. She really thought only of the girl's glad surprise at learning she was to go, and gave no heed to the misery that might be caused by the previous disappointment.

A woman came out from the house to ask directions for dinner.

"Yes, Polly," said Ursula Penn, "the Bowens will dine here as usual. Dinner at one-thirty, sharp, as the rector has to leave at three, to attend some meeting or other. Pity they had to have it on Sunday."

There was some discussion of the menu, and then Polly, the old cook, shuffled away, and again Ursula Pell sat alone.

"An actress!" she ruminated. "My little Iris an actress! Well, I guess not! But I can persuade her out of that foolishness, I'll bet! Why, if I can't do it any other way, I'll take her traveling. I'll—I'll give her her inheritance now, and let her amuse herself being an heiress before I'm dead and gone. Why should I wait for that, anyway? Suppose I give her the pin at once. I'd do it to-day, I believe, while the notion's on me, if I only had it here. I can get it from Mr. Chapin in a few days, and then—well, then, Iris would have something to interest her! I wonder how she'd like a whole king's ransom of jewels. She's like a princess herself. And then, too, that girl ought to marry, and marry well. I suppose I ought to have been thinking about this before. I must talk to the Bowens—of course, there's no one in Berrien—I did think one time Win might fall in love with her, but then he went away, and now he never comes up here any more.

"I wonder if Iris cares especially for Win. She never says anything about him, but that's no sign, one way or the other. I'd like her to marry Roger Downing, but she snubs him unmercifully. And he is a little countrified. With Iris' beauty and the fortune I shall leave her, she could marry anybody on earth! I believe I'll take her traveling a bit, say, to California, and then spend the winter in New York and give the girl a chance. And I must quit teasing her. But I do love to see

that surprised look when I play some outlandish trick on her!"

The old lady's eyes assumed a vixenish expression, and her smile widened till it was a sly, almost diabolical grin. Quite evidently she was even then planning some new and particularly disagreeable joke on Iris.

At length she rose and went into the house to write in her diary. Ursula Pell was of most methodical habits, and a daily journal was regularly kept.

The main part of the house was four square, a wide hall running straight through the center, with doors front and back. On the left, as one entered, the big living room was in front, and behind it a smaller sitting room, which was Mrs. Pell's own. Not that any one was unwelcome there, but it held many of her treasures and individual belongings, and served as her study or office, for the transaction of the various business matters in which she was involved. Frequently her lawyer was closeted with her there for long confabs, for Ursula Pell was greatly given to the pleasurable entertainment of changing her will.

She had made more wills than Lawyer Chapin could count, and each in turn was duly drawn up and witnessed, and the previous one destroyed. Her diary usually served to record the changes she proposed making, and when the time was ripe for a new will, the diary was requisitioned for direction as to the testamentary document.

The wealth of Ursula Pell was enormous, far more so than one would suppose from her simplicity of household appointments. This was not due to miserliness, but to her simple tastes and her frugal early life. Her fortune was the bequest of her husband, who, now dead more than twenty years, had amassed a great deal of money, which he had invested almost entirely in precious stones. It was his theory and belief that stocks and bonds were uncertain; whereas, gems were always valuable. His collection included some world-famous diamonds and rubies, and a set of emeralds that were historic.

Nobody, save Ursula Pell herself, knew where these stones were. Whether in safe deposit, or hidden on her own property, she had never given so much as a hint to her family or her lawyer. James Chapin knew his eccentric old client better than to inquire concerning the whereabouts of her treasure, and made and remade the wills disposing of it, without comment. A few of the smaller gems Mrs. Pell had given to Iris and to young Bannard, and some, smaller still, to more distant relatives, but the bulk of the collection had never been seen by the present generation.

She often told Iris that it should all be hers eventually, but Iris didn't seriously bank on the promise, for she knew her erratic aunt might quite conceivably will the jewels to some distant cousin, in a moment of pique at her niece.

Iris was not diplomatic. Never had she catered to her aunt's whims or wishes with a selfish motive. She honestly tried to live peaceably with Mrs. Pell, but of late she had begun to believe that impossible; hence her plans for going away.

As usual at that hour on Sunday morning, Ursula Pell had her house to herself.

Her modest establishment consisted of only four servants, who engaged additional help as their duties required. Purdy, the old gardener, was the husband of Polly, the cook; Agnes, the waitress, also served as ladies' maid when occasion called for it. Campbell, the chauffeur, completed the *menage;* and all other workers, and there were a good many, were em-

ployed by the day, and did not live at Pellbrook.

Mrs. Pell rarely went to church, and on Sunday mornings Campbell took Iris to the village. Agnes accompanied them, as she, too, attended the service.

Purdy and his wife drove an old horse and still older buckboard to a small church near by.

Polly was a marvel of efficiency, and managed cleverly to go to meeting without in any way delaying or interfering with her preparations for the Sunday dinner. Indeed, Ursula Pell would have no one around her who was not efficient. Waste and waste motion were equally taboo in that household.

The mistress of the place made her customary round of the kitchen quarters, and, finding everything in its usual satisfactory condition, returned to her own sitting room, and took her diary from her desk.

At half past twelve the Purdys returned, and at one o'clock the motor car brought its load from the village.

"Well, well, Mr. Bowen, how do you do?" the hostess greeted them, as they arrived; "and dear Mrs. Bowen, come right in and lay off your things."

The wide hall, with its tables, chairs, and mirrors, offered ample accommodations for hats and wraps, and soon the party were seated on the front part of the broad veranda that encircled three sides of the house.

Mr. Bowen was stout and jolly, and his slim shadow of a wife acted as a sort of Greek chorus, agreeing with and echoing his remarks and opinions.

Conversation was in a gay and bantering key, and Mrs. Pell was in high good humor. Indeed, she seemed nervously excited and a little hysterical, but this was not entirely unusual, and her guests fitted their mood to hers.

A chance remark led to the mention of Mrs. Pell's great fortune of jewels, and Mr. Bowen declared that he fully expected she would bequeath them all to his church to be made into a wonderful chalice.

"Not a bad idea," exclaimed Ursula Pell, "and one I've never thought of! I'll get Mr. Chapin over here to-morrow to change my will."

"Who will be the loser?" asked the rector. "To whom are they willed at present?"

"That's telling," and Mrs. Pell smiled mysteriously.

"Don't forget you've promised me the wonderful diamond pin, auntie," said Iris, bristling up a little.

"What diamond pin?" asked Mrs. Bowen curiously.

"Oh, for years Aunt Ursula has promised me a marvelous diamond pin, the most valuable of her whole collection. Haven't you, auntie?"

"Yes, Iris," and Mrs. Pell nodded her head. "That pin is certainly the most valuable thing I possess."

"It must be a marvel, then," said Mr. Bowen, his eyes opening wide, "for I've heard great tales of the Pell collection. I thought they were all unset jewels."

"Most of them are," Mrs. Pell replied, speaking carelessly; "but the pin I shall leave to Iris——"

At that moment dinner was announced, and the group went to the dining room. This large and pleasant room was in front on the right, and back of it were the pantries and kitchens. A long rear extension provided the servants' quarters, which were numerous and roomy. The house was comfortable, rather than pretentious; and though the village folk wondered why so rich a woman continued to live in such an old-fashioned home, those who knew her well realized that the place exactly met Ursula Pell's requirements.

The dinner was in harmony with the atmosphere of the home. Plentiful,

well-cooked food there was, but no attempt at elaborate confections or any great formality of service.

One concession to modernity was a small dish of stuffed dates at each cover, and of these Mrs. Pell spoke in scornful tones.

"Some of Iris' foolishness," she observed. "She wants all sorts of knick-knacks that she considers stylish."

"I don't at all, auntie," denied the girl, flushing with annoyance; "but when you ate those dates at Mrs. Graham's the other day, you enjoyed them so much I thought I'd make some. She gave me her recipe, and I think they're very nice."

"I do, too," agreed Mrs. Bowen, eating a date appreciatively, and feeling sorry for Iris' discomfiture. For though many girls might not mind such disapproval, Iris was of a sensitive nature and cringed beneath her aunt's sharp words.

In an endeavor to cover her embarrassment, she picked up a date from her own portion and bit off the end.

From the fruit spurted a stream of jet-black ink, which stained Iris' lips, offended her palate, and, spilling on her pretty, white frock, utterly ruined the dainty chiffon and lace.

She comprehended instantly. Her aunt, to annoy her, had managed to conceal ink in one of the dates, and to place it where Iris would naturally pick it up first.

With an angry exclamation, the girl left the table and ran upstairs.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOCKED ROOM.

URSULA PELL leaned back in her chair and shrieked with laughter.

"She will have stuffed dates and fancy fixin's, will she?" she cried; "I just guess she's had enough of those fallals now!"

"It quite spoiled her dress," said Mrs. Bowen, timidly remonstrant.

"That's nothing; I'll buy her another. Oh, I did that pretty cleverly, I can tell you! I took a little capsule, a long, thin one, and I filled it with ink, just as you'd fill a fountain pen. Oh, oh! Iris was so mad! She never suspected at all—and she bit into that date. Oh, oh! Wasn't it funny!"

"I don't think it was," began Mrs. Bowen, but her husband lifted his eyebrows at her and she said no more.

Though a clergyman, Alexander Bowen was not above mercenary impulses, and the mere reference, whether it had been meant or not, to a jeweled chalice made him unwilling to disapprove of anything such an influential hostess might do or say.

"Iris owes so much to her aunt," the rector said smilingly; "of course, she takes such little jests in good part."

"She'd better," said Ursula Pell, with a toss of her head; "if she knows which side her bread is buttered, she'll kiss the hand that strikes her."

"If it doesn't strike too hard," put in Mrs. Bowen, unable to resist some slight comment.

Again her husband frowned at her to keep silent, and the subject was dropped.

It was fully a quarter of an hour before Iris returned, her face red from scrubbing and still showing dark traces of the ink on chin and cheeks. She wore a plain little frock of white dimity, and smiled as she resumed her seat at the table.

"Now, Aunt Ursula," she said, "if you've any more ink to spill, spill it on this dress, and not on one of my best ones."

"Fiddlestrings, Iris. I'll give you a new dress; I'll give you two. It was well worth it, to see you bite into that date! My! You looked so funny! And you look funny yet! There're ink marks all over your face!"

Mrs. Pell shook with most irritating laughter, and Iris flushed in annoyance.

"I know it, auntie; but I couldn't get it off."

"Never mind. It'll wear off in a few days. And, meantime, you can wrap it up in a blotter!"

Again the speaker chuckled heartily at her own wit, and the rector joined her, while Mrs. Bowen with difficulty achieved a smile.

She was sorry for Iris, for this sort of jesting offended the girl more than it would most people, and the kind-hearted woman knew it. But, afraid of her husband's disapproval, she said nothing, and smiled at his unspoken behest.

Nor was Iris herself entirely forgiving. One could easily see that her calmly pleasant expression covered a deeper feeling of resentment and exasperation. She had the appearance of having reached her limit, and, though outwardly serene, was indubitably angry.

Her pretty face, ludicrous because of the indelible smears of ink, was pale and strained, and her deep brown eyes smoldered with repressed rage. Iris Clyde was far from meek. Her nature was, first of all, a just one, and to a degree retaliatory, even revengeful.

"Oh, I see your eyes snapping, Iris," exclaimed her aunt, delighted at the girl's annoyance. "I'll bet you'll get even with me for this!"

"Indeed I will, Aunt Ursula," and Iris' lips set in a straight line of determination, which, in conjunction with the ink stains, sent Mrs. Pell off into further peals of hilarity.

"Be careful, Iris," cautioned Mr. Bowen, himself wary. "If you get even with your aunt, she may leave the diamond pin to me instead of to you."

"Nixie," returned Iris saucily; "you've promised that particular diamond pin to me; haven't you, auntie?"

"I certainly have, Iris. However often I change my will, that pin is always designated as your inheritance."

"Where is it?" asked Mr. Bowen curiously. "May I not see it?"

"It is in a box in my lawyer's safe, at this moment," replied Mrs. Pell. "Mr. Chapin has instructions to hand the box over to Iris after my departure from this life, which I suppose you'd like to expedite, eh, Iris?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to poison you," Iris said, smiling; "but I confess I felt almost murderous when I ran up to my room just now and looked in the mirror!"

"I don't wonder!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowen, able to stifle her feelings no longer.

"Tut! tut!" cried the rector. "What talk!"

"Oh, they don't mean it," said Mrs. Pell. "You must take our chaff in good part, Mr. Bowen."

Dinner over, the Bowens almost immediately departed, and Iris, catching sight of her disfigured face in a mirror, turned angrily to her aunt.

"I won't stand it!" she exclaimed. "This is the last time I shall let you serve me in this fashion. I'm going to New York to-morrow, and I hope I shall never see you again!"

"Now, dearie, don't be too hard on your old auntie. It was only a joke. I'll get you another frock——"

"It isn't only the frock, Aunt Ursula; it's this horrid state of things generally. Why, I never dare touch or pick up a thing, without the chance of some fool stunt making trouble for me."

"Now, now, I will try not to do it any more. But don't talk about going away. If you do, I'll cut you out of my will entirely."

"I don't care. That would be better than living in a trick house! Look at my face! It will be days before these stains wear off. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Aunt Ursula!"

The old lady looked roguishly penitent, like a naughty child.

"Oh, fiddle-de-dee! You can get them off with whatcha-call-it soap. But I hope you won't! They make you look like a clown in a circus!"

Mrs. Pell's laughter had that peculiarly irritating quality that belongs to practical jokers, and Iris' sensitive nature was stung to the core.

"Oh, I hate you!" she cried. "You are a fiend in human shape!" And, without another word, she ran upstairs to her room.

Ursula Pell looked a little chagrined, then burst into laughter at the remembrance of Iris' face as she denounced her. Her expression suddenly changed to one of pain, and she walked slowly to her own sitting room, went in, and closed the door behind her.

It was part of the Sunday afternoon routine that Mrs. Pell should go to this room directly after dinner, and it was understood that she was not to be disturbed unless callers came.

A little later, Polly came into the dining room to look for Agnes, when she heard Mrs. Pell's voice. It was an agonized scream, not loud, but as of one greatly frightened. The woman ran through the hall and living room to the closed door of the sitting room. Then she clearly heard her mistress calling for help.

But the door was locked on the inside, and Polly could not open it.

"Help! Thieves!" came in terrified accents, and then the voice died away to a troubled groaning, only to rise in a shrill shriek of "Help! Quickly!" and then came again the moans and sighs of one in agony.

Frantically, Polly hurried to the kitchen and called her husband.

"One of her fool jokes," muttered the old man, as he shuffled toward the door of the locked room. "She's locked herself in, and she wants to get us all stirred up, thinkin' she's been attacked by thugs. In a minute she'll be laughin' at us."

"I don't think so," said Polly dubiously, though she well knew her mistress' ways. "Them yells was too natural."

Old Purdy listened, his ear against the door. "I can hear her rustlin' about a little," he said, "an'—there, that was a faint moan. Mebbe she's been took with a spell or suthin'."

"Let's get the door open, anyway," begged Polly. "If it's a joke, I'll stand it, but I'll bet you something's happened."

"What could happen, unless she's had a stroke? An' if that's it, she wouldn't be a-callin' out 'Thieves!' Didn't you say she said that?"

"Yes, as plain as day!"

"Then that proves she's foolin' us! How could there be thieves in there, an' the door locked?"

"Well, get it open; I'm plumb scared," and Polly's round face was pale with fright.

"But I can't. Do you want me to break it in? We'd get whatfor in earnest if I done that!"

"Run around and look in the windows," suggested Polly. "I'm going to call Miss Iris. I jest know somethin's wrong, this time."

"What is it?" asked Iris, responding to the summons. "What was that noise I heard?"

"Mrs. Pell screamed out, Miss Iris, and when I went to see what was the matter I found the door locked, and we can't get in."

"She screamed?" said Iris. "Perhaps it's just one of her jokes."

"That's what Purdy thinks, but it didn't sound so to me. It sounded like she was in mortal danger. Here's Purdy now. Well?"

"I can't see in the windows," was his report; "the shades is all pulled down, 'count o' the sun. She always has 'em so afternoons. And you well

know, nobody could get in them windows, or out of 'em."

Ursula Pell's sitting room was also her storehouse of many treasures. Collections of curios and coins left by her husband, additional objects of value bought by herself, made the room almost a museum; and, in addition, her desk contained money and important papers. Wherefore, she had had the windows secured by a strong steel lattice work that made ingress impossible to marauders. Two windows faced south and two west, and there was but one door, that into the living room.

This being locked, the room was inaccessible, and the drawn shades prevented even a glimpse of the interior. The windows were open, but the shades inside the steel gratings were not to be reached.

There was no sound now from the room, and the listeners stood, looking at one another, uncertain what to do next.

"Of course it's a joke," surmised Purdy; "but even so, it's our duty to get into that room. If so be's we get laughed at for our pains, it won't be anything outa the common; and if Mrs. Pell has had a stroke, or anything has happened to her, we must see about it."

"How will you get in?" asked Iris, looking frightened.

"Bust the door down," said Purdy succinctly. "I'll have to get Campbell to help. While I'm gone after him, you try to persuade Mrs. Pell to come out, if she's just trickin' us."

The old man went off, and Polly began to speak through the closed door.

"Let us in, Mrs. Pell," she urged. "Do, now, or Purdy'll spoil this good door. Now what's the sense o' that, if you're only a-foolin'? Open the door. Please do."

But no response of any sort was made. The stillness was tragic, yet there was the possibility, even the likelihood, that the tricky mistress of the house would only laugh at them when they had forced an entrance.

"Of course it's her foolishness," said Agnes, who had joined the group. She spoke in a whisper, not wanting to brave a reprimand for impertinence. "What does she care for having a new door made, if she can get us all scared up over nothing at all?"

Iris said nothing. Only a faint, almost imperceptible tinge remained of the ink stains on her face. She had used vigorous measures, and had succeeded in removing most of the disfigurement.

Campbell returned with Purdy.

"Ah, now, Mis' Pell, come out o' there," he wheedled; "do now! It's a sin and a shame to bust in this here heavy door. Likewise, it ain't no easy matter, nohow. I'm not sure me and Purdy can do it. Please, missis, unlock the door and save us all a lot of trouble."

But no sound came in answer.

"Let's all be awful still," suggested Purdy, "for quite a time, an' see if she don't make some move."

Accordingly each and every one of them scarcely breathed, and the silence was intense.

"I can't hear a sound," said Campbell at last, his ear against the keyhole, which was nearly filled by its own key. "I can't hear her breathing. You sure she's in there?"

"Of course," said Polly. "Didn't I hear her screamin'? I tell you we *got* to get in. Joke or no joke, we just got to!"

"You're right," said Campbell, looking serious. "I got ears like a hawk, and I bet I'd hear her breathing if she was in there. Come on, Purdy."

The door was thick and heavy, but the lock was a simple one, not a bolt, and the efforts of the two men splintered the jamb and released the door.

The sight revealed was overwhelm-

ing. The women screamed and the men stood aghast.

On the floor lay the body of Ursula Pell, and a glance was sufficient to see that she was dead. Her face was covered with blood, and a small pool of it had formed near her head. Her clothing was torn and disordered, and the whole room was in a state of chaos. A table was overturned, and the beautiful lamp that had been on it lay in shattered bits on the floor. A heavy-handled poker, belonging to the fire set, was lying near Mrs. Pell's head, and the contents of her writing desk were scattered in mad confusion on chairs and on the floor. A secret cupboard above the mantel, really a small concealed safe, was flung open, and was empty. An empty pocketbook lay on one chair, and an empty hand bag on another.

But these details were lost sight of in the attention paid to Mrs. Pell herself.

"She's dead! She's dead!" wailed Polly. "It wasn't a joke of hers; it was really robbers. She called out 'Thieves!' and 'Help!' several times. Oh, if I'd only got you men in sooner!"

"But, good land, Polly!" cried Campbell. "What do you mean by thieves? How could anybody get in here with the door locked? Or if he was in, how could he get out?"

"Maybe he's here now!" Polly exclaimed, gazing about wildly.

"We'll soon see!" and Campbell searched the entire room. It was not difficult, for there were no alcoves or cupboards; the furniture was mostly curio cabinets, treasure tables, a few chairs, and a couch. Campbell looked under the couch, and behind the window curtains, but no intruder was found.

"Mighty curious," said old Purdy, scratching his head; "how in blazes could she scream murder and thieves, when there wasn't no one in here? And how could any one be in here with her and get out, leavin' that 'ere door locked behind him?"

"She was murdered all right!" declared Campbell. "Look at them bruises on her neck! See, her dress is tore open at the throat! What kind o' villain could 'a' done that? Gosh, it's fierce!"

Iris came timidly forward to look at the awful sight. Unable to bear it, she turned and sank on the couch, completely unnerved.

"Get a doctor, shall I?" asked Campbell, who was the most composed of them all.

"What for?" asked Purdy. "She's dead as a doornail, poor soul. But yes, I s'pose it's the proper thing. An' we oughta get the corowner, an' not touch nothin' till he comes."

"The coroner!" Iris' eyes stared at him. "What for?"

"Well, you see, Miss Iris, it's custom'ry when they's a murder——"

"But she couldn't have been murdered! Impossible! Who could have done it? It's—it's an accident."

"I wish I could think so, Miss Iris." Purdy's honest old face was very grave as he spoke. "But you look around. See, there's been robbery. Look at that there empty pocketbook an' empty bag! An' the way she's been—hit! Why, see them marks on her chest! She's fair black an' blue! An' her skirt's tore an'——"

"Good Lord!" cried Polly. "Her pocket's tore out! She always had a big pocket inside each dress skirt, and this one's been—why, it's been cut out!"

There could be no doubt that the old lady had been fearfully attacked; nor could there be any doubt of robbery. The ransacked desk, the open safe, the cut-out pocket, added to the state of the body itself, left no room for theories of accident or self-destruction.

"Holler for the doctor," commanded Purdy, instinctively taking the helm.

"You telephone him, Campbell, and then he'll see about the coroner, or whoever he wants. And I think we'd oughter call up Mr. Bowen. What say, Miss Iris?"

"Mr. Bowen? Why?"

"Oh, I dunno; it seems sorter decent, that's all."

"Very well, do so. I—I suppose I ought to call up Mr. Bannard——"

"Sure, you ought to. But let's get the people up here, first, then you can get long distance to New York afterward."

Once over the first shock of horror, Purdy's sense of responsibility asserted itself, and he was thoughtful and efficient.

"All of you go outa this room," he directed. "I'll take charge of it till the police get here. This is a mighty strange case, an' I can't see any light as to how it could 'a' happened. But it did happen. Poor Mis' Pell is done for, an' I'll stand guard over her body till somebody with more authority gets here. You, Agnes, be ready to wait on the door, and, Polly, you look after Miss Iris. Campbell, you telephone like I told you to the——"

Submissively they all obeyed him. Iris, with an effort, rose from the couch and went out to the living room. There she sat in a big chair, and stared at nothing, until Polly, watching, became alarmed.

"Be ca'm, now, Miss Iris; do be ca'm," she urged stupidly.

"Hush up, Polly! I am calm. Don't say such foolish things. You know I'm not the sort to faint or fly into hysterics."

"I know you ain't, Miss Iris, but you're so still and queerlike——"

"Who wouldn't be? Polly, explain it. What happened to Aunt Ursula, do you think?"

"Miss Iris, they ain't no explanation. I'm a quick thinker, I am, and I tell you there ain't no way that murderer—for there sure was a murderer—could 'a' got in that room or got out, with that door locked."

"Then she killed herself?"

"No; she couldn't possibly 'a' done that. You know yourself she couldn't. When she screamed 'Thieves!' the thieves was there. Now, how did they get away? They ain't no secret way in an' out, that I know. I've lived in this house too many years to be fooled about its buildin'. It's a mystery, that's what it is—a mystery."

"Will it ever be solved?" and Iris looked at old Polly as if inquiring of a sibyl.

"Land, child, how do I know? I ain't no fortune teller. I s'pose some of those smart detecters can make it out, but it's beyond me!"

"Oh, Polly, they won't have detectives, will they?"

"Sure they will, Miss Iris; they'll have to."

"Now, I'm through with the telephone," said Campbell, reappearing. "Shall I get New York for you, Miss Iris?"

"No," said Iris, rising. "I'll get the call myself."

CHAPTER III.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE CHECK BOOK.

WINSTON BANNARD'S apartments in New York were comfortable, though not luxurious. The Caxton Annex catered to young bachelors who were not millionaires, but who liked to live pleasantly; and Bannard had been contentedly ensconced there ever since he had left his aunt's home.

He had always been glad he had made the move, for city life was far more to his liking than the village ways of Berrien; and if his law practice could not be called enormous, it was growing, and he had developed some real ability.

Of late he had fallen in with a crowd

of men much richer than himself, and association with them had led to extravagance in the matter of cards for high stakes, motors of high cost, and high living generally.

The high cost of high living is undeniable, and Bannard not infrequently found himself in financial difficulties of more or less depth and importance.

As he entered his rooms Sunday evening about seven, he found a telegram and a telephone notice from the hotel office. The latter merely informed him that Berrien, Connecticut, had called him at four o'clock. The telegram read:

For Heaven's sake come up here at once. Aunt Ursula is dead.

It was signed Iris, and Bannard read it, standing by the window to catch the gleams of fading daylight. Then he sank into a chair and read it over again, though he now knew it by rote.

He was not at all stunned. His alert mind traveled quickly from one thought to another, and for ten minutes his tense, strained position, his set jaw, and his occasionally winking eyes betokened successive cogitations on matters of vital importance. Then he jumped up, looked at his watch, consulted a time-table, and, not waiting for an elevator, ran down the stairs through that atmosphere of Sunday afternoon quiet, which is perhaps nowhere more noticeable than in a New York hotel.

A taxicab, a barely caught train, and before nine o'clock Winston Bannard was at the Berrien railroad station.

Campbell was there to meet him, and as they drove to the house Bannard sat beside the chauffeur, that he might learn the details of the tragedy.

"But I don't understand, Campbell," Bannard said. "How could she be murdered, alone in her room with the door locked? Did she—didn't she—kill herself?"

But the chauffeur was close-mouthed. "I don't know, Mr. Bannard," he returned. "It's all mighty queer, and the detective told me not to gossip or chatter about it at all."

"But, my stars, man! It isn't gossip to tell me all there is to tell."

"But there's nothing to tell. The bare facts you know—I've told you those. As to the rest, the police or Miss Iris must tell you."

"You're right," agreed Bannard. "I'm glad you are not inclined to guess or surmise. There must be some explanation, of course. How about the windows?"

"Well, you know those windows, Mr. Bannard. They're as securely barred as the ones in the Berrien Bank, and more so. Ever since Mrs. Pell took that room for her treasure room, they've been protected by steel lattice work, and that's untouched. That settles the windows. There's only the one door, and that Purdy and I broke open. Now, that's all I know about it."

Bannard relapsed into silence, and Campbell didn't speak again until they reached the house.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come!" was the first greeting to the young man as he entered the hall at Pellbrook. It was spoken by Mrs. Bowen, who had been with Iris ever since she was summoned by telephone, that afternoon. "It's all so dreadful. The doctors are examining the body now—and the coroner is here and two detectives, and Iris is so queer——" The poor little lady quite broke down, in her relief at having some one to share her responsibility.

"Isn't Mr. Bowen here?" Bannard said, as she followed her into the living room.

"No; he had to attend service. He'll come after church. Here is Iris."

The girl did not rise at Bannard's approach, but sat, looking up at him, her face full of inquiry.

"Where have you been?" she de-

manded. "Why didnt' you come sooner? I telegraphed at four o'clock. I telephoned first, but they said—they said you were out."

"I was. I only came in at seven, and then I found your messages. I caught the first train possible."

"It doesn't matter," said Iris wearily. "There's nothing you can do—nothing anybody can do. Oh, Win, it's horrible!"

"Of course it is, Iris. But I'm so in the dark. Tell me all about it."

"Oh, I can't. I can't seem to talk about it. Mrs. Bowen will tell you."

The little lady told all she knew, and then one of the detectives appeared, to question Bannard. He explained his presence, and told who he was, and then asked to go into his aunt's sitting room.

"Not just now," said the man, whose name was Hughes. "The doctors are busy in there, with the coroner."

"Why so late?" asked Bannard. "What have they been doing all afternoon?"

"Doctor Littell came at once," explained Mrs. Bowen. "He's her own doctor, you know. But that coroner, Doctor Timken, never got here till this evening. Why, here's Mr. Chapin!"

Charles Chapin, who was Mrs. Pell's lawyer, entered, and also Mr. Bowen; so there was quite a group in waiting when the doctors came out of the closed room.

"It's the strangest case imaginable," said Coroner Timken, his face white and terrified. "There's not the least possibility of suicide, and yet there's no explanation for a murder."

"Why do you say that?" asked Chapin, who had heard little of the details.

"The body is terribly injured. There are livid bruises on her chest, shoulders, and upper arms. There are marks on her wrists, as if she had been bound by ropes, and similar marks on her ankles."

"Incredible!" cried Mr. Chapin. "Bound?"

"The marks can mean nothing else. They are as if cords had been tightly drawn, and on one ankle the stocking is slightly stained with blood."

"What?" exclaimed Mrs. Bowen.

"Yes, and the flesh beneath the stain is abraded round the ankle, and the skin broken. The other ankle shows slight marks of the cord, but it did not cut into the flesh on that side. Her wrists, too, show red marks and indentations, as of cords. It is inexplicable."

"But the bruises?" pursued Mr. Chapin. "And the awful wound on her face?"

"There is no doubt that she was attacked for the purpose of robbery. Moreover, the thief was looking for something in particular. It is clear that he stole money or valuables, but the state of the desk and safe prove a desperate hunt for some paper or article of special value. Also, the pocket, cut and torn from the skirt, proves a determination to secure the treasure. As we reconstruct the crime, the intruder intimidated Mrs. Pell by threats and by physical violence; tied her while search was made through her room; and then, in a rage of disappointment, flung the old lady to the floor, where she hit her head on a sharp-pointed brass knob of the fender. This penetrated her temple and caused her death. These things are facts; also, the state of the room, the overturned table and chairs, the broken lamp, the ransacked desk and safe—all these are facts; but what theory can account for the disappearance of the murderer from the locked room?"

There was no answer until Detective Hughes said: "I've always been told that the more mysterious and insoluble

a crime seems to be, the easier it is to solve it."

"You have, eh?" returned the coroner. "Then get busy on this one. It's beyond me. Why, that woman's wrist is sprained, if not broken; she has some internal injuries, and she was suffering from shock and fright. The attack was diabolical! It may be that the murder was unpremeditated, but the mauling and bruising of the old lady was the work of a strong man and a hardened wretch."

"Why didn't she scream sooner?" asked Hughes, who was listening intently. He had been detailed on other duties while his confrères investigated the scene of the crime.

"Gagged, probably," answered Timken. "There are slight marks at the corners of her mouth which indicate a gag was used, for a time at least. How long was it," he said abruptly, turning to Iris, "that your aunt was in that room alone—I mean alone, so far as you knew?"

"I don't know; I was up in my own room all the time after dinner, and—I don't know what time it was when they called me. I seem to have lost all track of time."

"Don't bother the girl," said Mrs. Bowen. "Polly, you tell about the time."

The servants were in and out of the room, now clustered at the doorway, now hurrying off on errands and back again.

"It must 'a' been about ha' past three when I heard her scream," said Polly; "or maybe a bit earlier, but not much. I was in the dining room, lookin' for Agnes to give me a hand in the kitchen, and I heard her holler."

"And you went to the door at once?" asked Timken.

"Yes; just's quick's I could. But the door was locked."

"Was that usual?"

"Yes, sir; she often locks it when she takes a nap Sunday afternoons. And then I went and called Purdy, and we couldn't get in."

"Yes, I know about the barred windows and so on. Did you hear any further sounds from Mrs. Pell?"

"Some; sorta movin' around an' faint moanin's. But the truth is, we thought she was a-foolin' us."

"Fooling you!"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Pell, she was great for jokin'. Many's the time she's hollered 'Help! Polly!' and when I'd get there, she'd laugh fit to kill at me. She was that way, sir. She was always foolin' us."

"Is this true?" asked Timken, turning to the others.

They all corroborated Polly's statements. Even Chapin, the lawyer, told of jests and tricks his wealthy client had played on him, and Winston Bannard declared he had suffered so much from his aunt's whims that he had been forced to move away.

"And you, Miss Clyde; did she so tease you?"

"Indeed she did," said Iris. "I think I was her favorite victim. Scarcely a day passed that she did not annoy and distress me by some practical joke. You know about the ink, this noon——" She turned to Mrs. Bowen.

"Yes," said that lady, but she looked grave and thoughtful.

"But surely," pursued the coroner, "one could tell the difference between the screams of a victim in mortal agony, and those of a jest."

"No, sir," and Polly shook her head. "Mrs. Pell was that clever, she'd make you think she'd been hurt awful, when she was just trickin' you. But, anyways, sir, me an' Purdy we did all we could, and we couldn't get in. Then Campbell, he come, and helped to break down the door."

"And you're sure the murderer couldn't have slipped through as you opened the door?"

"Not a chance!" spoke up Purdy. "We smashed it open. The lock just splintered out of the jamb, as you can see for yourself, and we were all gathered in a clump on this side. No, sir, the room was quiet as death—and empty, save for Mrs. Pell herself."

"And she was dead then?"

"Yes, sir," asseverated Purdy solemnly. "I ain't no doctor, but I made sure she was dead. She'd died within a minute or so; she was most as warm as in life, and the blood was still a-flowin' from her head where she was struck."

"Did you move anything in the room?"

"No, sir; only so much as was necessary to get around. The table that was upset had a 'lectric lamp on it, which had a long danglin' green cord, 'cause it was put in after the reg'lar wirin' was done. I coiled up that 'ere cord, and picked up the pieces of broken glass, so's we could step around. But I left the bag and pocketbook and all just where they was flung. And the litter from the desk, all over the floor, I didn't touch that, neither; nor I didn't touch the body."

Purdy's voice faltered and his old eyes filled with tears.

"You did well," commended the coroner, nodding his head kindly at him. "Just one more question. Was Mrs. Pell in her usual good spirits today? Did she do anything or say anything that seemed out of the ordinary?"

"No," and Purdy shook his head. "I don't think so; do you, Polly?"

"Not that I noticed," said his wife. "She cut up an awful trick on Miss Iris, but that wasn't unusual."

"What was it?" The coroner then listened to an account of the date with ink in it. The story was told by Mrs. Bowen, as Iris refused to talk at all.

"A pretty mean trick," was the coroner's opinion. "Didn't you resent it, Miss Clyde?"

"She did not," spoke up the rector, in a decided way. "Miss Clyde is a young woman of too much sense and also of too much affection for her dear aunt, to resent a good-humored jest such——"

"Good-humored jest!" exclaimed Hughes. "Going some! A jest like that—spoilin' a young girl's pretty Sunday dress——"

"Never mind, Hughes," said Timken reprovingly; "we're not judging Mrs. Pell's conduct now. This is an investigation, a preliminary inquiry, rather; but not a judgment seat. Miss Clyde, I must ask that you answer me a few questions. You left your aunt's presence directly after your guests had departed?"

"Within a few moments of their leaving."

"She was then in her usual health and good spirits?"

"So far as I know."

"Any conversation passed between you?"

"Only a little."

"Amicable?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Friendly—affectionate—not quarrelsome."

"It was not exactly affectionate, as I told her I was displeased at her spoiling my gown."

"Ah! And what did she say?"

"That she would buy me another."

"Did that content you?"

"I wasn't discontented. I was annoyed at her unkind trick, and I told her so. That is all."

"Of course that is all," again interrupted Mr. Bowen. "I can answer for the cordial relationship between aunt and niece, and I can vouch for the fact that these merry jests didn't really stir up dissensions between these two estimable people. Why, only to-day Mrs. Pell was dilating on the wonderful legacies she meant to bestow on Miss Clyde. She also referred to a jeweled

chalice for my church, but I am sure these remarks were in no way prompted by any thought of immediate death. On the contrary, she was in gayer spirits than I have ever seen her."

"I think she was overexcited," said Mrs. Bowen thoughtfully. "Don't you, Iris? She was giggling in an almost hysterical manner, it seemed to me."

"I didn't notice," said Iris wearily. "Aunt Ursula was a creature of moods. She was grave or gay without apparent reason. I put up with her silly jokes usually, but to-day's performance seemed unnecessary and unkind. However, it doesn't matter now."

"No," declared Winston Bannard; "and it does no good to rake over the old lady's queer ways. We all know about her habit of playing tricks, and I for one don't wonder that Polly thought she screamed out to trick somebody. Nor does it matter. If Polly hadn't thought that, she couldn't have done any more than she did do to get into that room as soon as possible. Could she, now?"

"No," agreed the coroner. "Nor does it really affect our problem of how the murder was committed."

"Let me have a look into that room," said Bannard suddenly.

"You a detective?" asked Timken.

"Not a bit of it, but I want to see its condition."

"Come on in," said the other. "They've put Mrs. Pell's body on the couch, but except for that, nothing's been touched."

Hughes went in with Bannard and the coroner, and the three men were joined by Lawyer Chapin.

Silently they took in the details. The still figure on the couch, with face solemnly covered, seemed to make conversation undesirable.

Hughes alertly moved about peering at things, but touching almost nothing. Bannard and Mr. Chapin stood motionless, gazing at the evidences of crime.

"Got a cigarette?" whispered Hughes to Bannard, and mechanically the young man took out his case and offered it. The detective took one, and then continued his minute examination of the room and its appointments.

At last he sat down in front of the desk and began to look through such papers as remained in place. There were many pigeonholes and compartments, which held small memorandum books and old letters and stationery.

Hughes opened and closed several books, and then suddenly turned to Bannard with the question:

"You haven't been up here to-day, have you, Mr. Bannard? I mean, before you came up this evening."

"N-no, certainly not," was the answer, and the man looked decidedly annoyed. "What are you getting at, Mr. Hughes?"

"Oh, nothing. Where have you been all day, Mr. Bannard?"

"In New York city."

"Not been out of it?"

"I rode my motor cycle out of town this morning for a little fresh air, after a week's work indoor. Am I being quizzed?"

"You are. You state that you were not up here, in this room, this afternoon, about three o'clock?"

"I certainly do affirm that! Why?"

"Because I observe here on the desk a half-smoked cigarette of the same kind you just gave me."

"And you think that is incriminating evidence! A little farfetched, Mr. Hughes."

"Also, on this chair is a New York paper of to-day's date, and not the one that is usually taken in this house."

"Indeed!" But Winston Bannard had turned pale.

"And," continued Hughes, holding up a check book, "this last stub in Mrs. Pell's check book shows that she made

out to you, *to-day*, a check for five thousand dollars!"

"What!" cried Mr. Chapin.

"Yes, sir, a check stub, in Mrs. Pell's own writing, dated *to-day!* Where is that check, Mr. Winston Bannard, and when did you get it? What were you searching this room for? And why did you kill your aunt afterward? Come, sir, speak up!"

To be continued in the next issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, out next Tuesday, on April 30th. Do not forget that, as the magazine comes out once every week, you will not have long to wait for another installment of this gripping serial.

AN OUT-OF-DOOR OPPORTUNITY

IN the report of the Commission on Industrial Relations, a couple of years ago, it was found that the practice of using convicts in penitentiaries and prisons for the manufacture of general commerce was productive of evil results as regards not only the convicts but the general public as well; that the competition of prison-made articles resulted in the existence of a low-wage scale in many industries, and subjected the manufacturers to a species of competition which ought not to exist in any civilized community; that the only beneficiaries of the convict-labor system were the contractors who were permitted by the States to exploit the commodities manufactured by prison inmates.

After its findings the commission recommended "the abolition, so far as possible, of indoor manufacture, and the substitution of such outdoor work as that upon State farms and State roads, providing that where prisoners are employed they should be compensated, and that the products which they manufacture should be sold in competition with the products of free labor."

Now is the accepted time for the Federal and State governments to busy themselves with directing prison labor to agriculture, for there never was a time in the history of this country when the necessity was more urgent. The problem, it is realized, is full of drawbacks and red tape, but every effort should be made to effect a mode of operation.

The reëmployment of the discharged prisoner ought to be directed also along these lines by the authorities. There are more men leaving prison yearly than one would suppose. According to the last United States census there were 2,823 penal institutions in this country, from which there were annually discharged upward of half a million persons.

CRACKSMEN STEAL BOOKS ON CRIMINOLOGY

WITH a laudable ambition to study every phase of their profession, cracksmen recently stole the book of an eminent criminologist and a volume on finger-print systems when they raided a Ninth Street bookstore on a round of week-end safe robberies. The store where the books were stolen was that of the Archway Book Company, No. 47 North Ninth Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Postage stamps valued at two dollars were also taken from the safe, which was opened by the expert working of the combination.

"Baby Jane's" Revenge

by Anna Alice Chapin

Author of "Boston Betty's Alibi," "The Seventh Shot," "Thieves' Luck," etc.

"BABY JANE" could hardly sleep at night, so great was her hate of "Boston Betty," and so keen her desire to get even with her. To any one at all familiar with the career of either lady, this attitude of mind will not appear strange. Both of them crooks, both young, and of the same sex, there was bound to be a certain rivalry between them; but Betty was so much the cleverer of the two that heretofore the honors had been all hers.

Betty had, on one occasion, double-crossed Baby Jane in a way which had seared the very soul of the last-named young woman. Jane had had a plant—she called herself Lena Bolton at the time—and was all fixed to trim a movie manager, when Betty came in between—Betty, and her abominable fox terrier, Alibi, the wisest little crook dog on earth. Space will not permit a full recital of Jane's wrongs, but they were enough to embitter her existence. She was doing well, materially speaking, so her sufferings were purely psychological; but, with the curdled venom of the very weak and shifty when aroused, she had dedicated herself to the destruction of Boston Betty.

With this end in view, and thrilling to the rapture of an unexpected opportunity, she invaded the office of Danny Lonsdell, plain-clothes man, one bright autumn afternoon, and announced herself in a position to "land" Betty at last.

Danny Lonsdell regarded her shrewdly. He knew Jane of old, and he knew also that not lightly would she put herself in the hands of the law. With the somewhat cynical tolerance engendered by fifteen years spent as a star detective, he jumped to the correct conclusion. Baby Jane had it in for Betty, and was willing to take a long chance herself in order to get square.

Baby Jane was pretty and young looking, and appealing in manner, hence the moniker which clung to her through two-thirds of the underworld; but to-day there was a glitter in her blue eyes quite the reverse of babyish. After she had stated her business, her soft red mouth snapped shut like the jaws of some vicious little animal.

"So you think you've got a line on Bet?" said Danny Lonsdell. "Since when have you been working for the force, Janie?"

"Since she played me a dirty trick, and cheated me out of——" She checked herself in time.

Lonsdell chuckled. "Cheated you out of a haul, eh? That's like Betty! She can play it round you cheap crooks in circles! No offense, Jane, but you know it's so. I swear I admire that

girl! She never pulled a job yet that wasn't a work of art. Go ahead with your yarn; it must be some spiel to bring you here."

"You ain't got anything on me this time," she said, eyes flashing. "I'm running straight, Mr. Lonsdell!"

"Sure—sure! They all are," said Danny soothingly. "Don't worry, Jane. If you can really tip me off about Betty, I'll guarantee that the cops won't trouble you for—well, for a month or two anyhow."

"And I'll be out in Frisco by then," she told him brazenly. "Well, here goes. Mr. Lonsdell, does Betty hang out round the jewelry counters of a department store just to admire the pretty things in the glass cases?"

"You bet your life she doesn't," said Mr. Lonsdell, with energy. "Is that what she's up to?"

"That's it. She's been playing the swell dame 'round Fanshawe's for a week—bought some gilt-edged clothes, and chummed up with the managers and floorwalkers until they think she's the real cheese. And now she's started on the jewelry department. First it was small silver for wedding presents, and now she's thinking about buying two or three really good diamonds for a pendant. She dug up one stone out of her bag, and had all the clerks gaping at it—a real one, mind you! The Lord knows where she got it!"

"Good work," commented Lonsdell. "Of course, that's made her solid with the store people. By the bye, Jane, what were you doing in the jewelry department?"

"I? Oh, I *was* admiring the pretty things in the glass cases," she informed him sweetly. "Besides, I had caught a glimpse of Bet wandering about looking at feather boas and fans."

"Lift anything?"

"Sir!" She was the picture of indignant virtue.

"I meant Betty," Lonsdell hastened to explain, but his eyes twinkled. "Did she see you?"

"No, I'm sure she didn't. I wore a dark wig and a veil."

"Well, go ahead."

"Well, I think she's about ready to strike. This morning she asked to have three particular diamonds reserved for her, and said she'd be in this afternoon at four with a final decision. Seems she's got a beautiful old setting that she wants to bring!" Baby Jane did her best to imitate the gentle, well-bred drawl which Boston Betty could effect so well when she chose to impersonate a light of high society. "So, if you want to nab her with the goods, you'd better beat it to Fanshawe's diamond counter in about fifteen minutes."

Lonsdell would probably have done so if his chief had not at that particular moment telephoned, demanding his presence instantly in connection with a big murder case which had been driving the department distracted for two weeks.

"Confound it," he remarked, as he hung up. Then he made a quick decision, and, taking the receiver again from the hook, he called up a fifth-rate cigar store, where one of his most valuable assistants could usually be located.

"I want Bangs—Charley Bangs. . . . Hello, that you, Charley? Come up to the office as fast as you can. You'll find a young lady here who'll lead the way, and I want you to shadow the woman she points out, for the next hour or so. Shadow her absolutely, keep track of every step she takes, and every soul she speaks to, and every time she moves her hand. It's Boston Betty, Charley, and if we get her, I'll see you get enough cigarettes to make you sick for a year! . . . Right! Hurry up! And call me up at the chief's office in half an hour; I want a report. After that I'll probably be on the job myself. Good-by!"

To those who do not know Charley Bangs, the detective's choice might seem peculiar. For Charley was an anæmic, weak-eyed youth, without the least vestige of intellect, whose sole idea of joy was the consumption of cigarettes which smelled like gas bombs, varied by the exciting pastime of shooting craps for pennies. But for several years Dan Lonsdell had made use of him on his various cases, and Charley was the best aid he had, bar none. Dull and phlegmatic as he was, he was absolutely dependable, and he obeyed orders like a veteran soldier. Lonsdell liked to do his own thinking, and for his purposes Charley Bangs was worth a dozen ambitious and speculative plain-clothes men.

Baby Jane regarded Charley's receding chin with a scornful gaze, but she knew he must be all right, or Lonsdell would not have sent for him. So, after a cool greeting, she marched him over to the great Fanshawe shop, where everything in the world was for sale, from pins to elephants.

And—sure enough!—almost the first figure they caught sight of in the sedately brilliant jewelry department was that of Boston Betty herself; Boston Betty, richly though soberly arrayed, dotted-veiled, white-gloved, adorned with dark and becoming furs that harmonized admirably with her own dark hair. She was deep in earnest talk with two of the older and more responsible clerks of the department, and a small tray full of glittering diamonds was before her.

"In time," whispered Charley Bangs, as he strolled along a little corridor lined with silver-filled cases.

"In time," exultingly replied Baby Jane, as she bent over some gold wrist watches, asking prices in a tone that she tried to make sufficiently interested.

Apparently Betty did not see either of them; she was wholly engrossed in the matter on hand—so wholly that her two "shadows" were able by degrees to approach quite close to her, in the seeming pursuit of their own business. They could hear her clear, well-pitched drawl distinctly:

"I think that I will decide upon the three that I looked at this morning, Mr. Weldon. You see they match my own gem perfectly, and look quite lovely in the setting."

"That is right, Mrs. Beale. You have a good eye for jewels—and that old setting is altogether charming!" It was old Weldon, head of the jewelry trade at Fanshawe's, who spoke, and his tone was cordially respectful. "When will you wish the complete ornament delivered?"

"Oh, as soon as possible! I am going to Palm Beach in ten days. Shall I make a payment on deposit?"

"Well"—old Weldon hesitated—"under the circumstances it is hardly necessary, but——"

"Here is a hundred dollars," said Betty at once, extending the bill. "And you have my own diamond anyway, in case you are afraid I am trying to cheat you!" She smiled.

"Oh, Mrs. Beale," exclaimed Weldon, much flustered, "I'm sure such an idea never entered any of our heads! Here, Clemens, put these four diamonds and the silver pendant in a separate case. I'll attend to the order myself later."

The round-eyed "shadows" watched him write down further directions and probably a fictitious address in his order book, and then proceeded to watch Betty stroll away—not toward the street door, but toward the interior of the shop. They looked at each other. Had she really passed up her chance, or was she playing for something bigger than they had guessed? Was the coup yet to come off? And why had she left a genuine diamond and a hundred dollars behind her, as well as the

loot they had counted on her trying to make away with?

Even as they conjectured thus blankly, Betty vanished.

Not altogether, however. While Charley Bangs was staring about him and swearing softly, Baby Jane had dashed through the glass door that separated the jewelry department from the rest of the shop. There are times when hatred is more acute than system.

Charley had sense enough to wait for his partner where he was. A big store is a splendid place in which to lose any one. He proved to have chosen the better part, for within five minutes Baby Jane was back, breathless, and with a steely gleam in her baby-blue eyes that boded no good to Boston Betty.

"Say, I lost her!" gasped Charley Bangs, under his breath. He was decidedly chagrined, for he was nothing if not methodical, and could ordinarily be trusted to attach himself automatically and without deviation to any sort of trail.

"I lost her," he repeated.

"*I* didn't," said Baby Jane, with cold venom. "It would take a lot to make me lose Betty this time! I trailed her all right, and I know just where she is now, and I know *what she's done with the diamonds!*"

Charley's pale eyes nearly popped out of his head.

"Say!" he breathed. "She got 'em, then?"

Jane nodded. Charley glanced toward the diamond counter. There was no sign of excitement so far.

"Do we wise 'em?" he suggested doubtfully.

"No," snapped Baby Jane sharply. "This is my job! I don't want any one in on it that I can help. I'm going to land Boston Betty myself, see? As for you, you obey orders and just keep on shadowing!"

"Where is she?" asked Charley Bangs.

"Upstairs in the hairdressing parlor, having her hair dressed. It's one of those new fussy coy-furs, and—she's got the diamonds salted away inside of the pompadour! I saw her slip 'em in!"

"Gee!" ejaculated Charley, in an awed murmur. "She's got her nerve with her, all right!"

"Nerve? She wrote it first," said Baby Jane, with bitterness. "There ain't anything on the footstool that she hasn't the nerve to pull off if she gets the chance. Here's where she doesn't get the chance, though. Come along. That lovely black hair of hers ought to be most done by this time."

Together they repaired to the mezzanine floor, where hairdressers and manicurists beguiled the idle hours of fashionable shoppers. For nearly half an hour they loitered, looked, and chatted. And then, with one accord, they suddenly became profoundly absorbed in contemplating the palms and rubber plants which decorated that luxurious gallery. For the lady who sauntered out from the "beauty parlor," pausing occasionally to admire her own charming reflection in the many gilt-framed mirrors about her, was none other than Betty herself—Elizabeth Buxter, alias Mary Beale, alias Boston Betty!

Her hair had been really beautifully done. Its dark waves under the chic little street hat were crisp and shining. There was a slight color in her somewhat sallow cheeks. Altogether, she presented an impeccable picture of an attractive young woman of the more subdued section of the smart set.

Strolling along with that unmistakable air of pleasantly occupied leisure so characteristic of the class to which she affected to belong, she made her way nonchalantly to the elevator, through the crowded aisles of the main floor,

where she stopped to look at some particularly dainty handkerchiefs, and again to ask the price of a new assortment of broad leather belts, and thence to the street.

Then Charley Bangs and Baby Jane found their work cut out for them.

They had both hoped that she would take a taxi; it would have been a simple matter to keep another machine in sight. But Betty had other and more complex plans.

First she approached a shabby young man who was holding the leash of a brown-and-white fox terrier. The little dog nearly wriggled himself out of his expensive brown leather harness at sight of her, and the shabby man touched his shabby cap. Boston Betty handed him a folded bill, and took over the dog.

"Thanks, so much, for taking care of him," they heard her say. "I never like taking him into shops; he gets so excited, and then people don't like dogs underfoot. Thanks again."

She moved off slowly, after stooping to pat the dog. The shabby man started off in the opposite direction.

"Say," whispered Jane sharply, "you ought to follow him!"

"Weren't my orders," said Charley, the automaton. "I was to follow her. The boss never said nothin' about nobody else."

"Then I'll follow him!" snapped Jane. "You boob, she may have slipped him the diamonds inside that bill. On your way—I'm off!"

She darted through the hurrying crowd of shoppers, and vanished. Charley Bangs proceeded on his imperturbable way of obeying orders.

She was, as he himself put it later, "some dame to shadow!"

First she went to a drug store, where she purchased a box of chocolates and a bottle of perfume. Then she went to a florist's, and paid fabulous sums for an enormous bunch of violets and a long box of roses. Next she stopped at the headquarters of a charittable organization, where she left the flowers. Then she went to a butcher's shop and got a package of bones for the dog, and after that stopped at a news stand and bought the evening papers and a new magazine. Finally she entered a French restaurant and ordered tea and cigarettes.

Satisfying himself that he could keep an eye on her from the nearest telephone booth, Charley called up Lonsdell in feverish haste. He explained all the circumstances, and promised to stay on the job until Danny could get there himself. The detective said he would be there in fifteen minutes, and he was.

Betty was comfortably drinking her tea and smoking her first cigarette when Lonsdell arrived. The fox terrier was curled up beside her chair, occasionally raising a wistfully sniffing nose toward the deliciously odorous butcher's bundle. His manners were too perfect to permit him openly to beg.

Lonsdell approached until he was directly opposite Betty, and then, resting his hands on the back of a chair, remarked quite amiably:

"How are you, Betty?"

She glanced up without a tremor.

"Miss Buxter, please," she said gently.

"Quite so; Miss Buxter, of course. My mistake." Danny bowed gravely. "May I sit down for a moment?"

"Certainly, Mr. Lonsdell. Will you have a cup of tea?"

Danny's lips twitched. "Not just now, thank you," he answered, with a formality equal her own. "You're looking very well, Bet—Miss Buxter. Doing your hair a new way, aren't you?"

"Yes," she rejoined tranquilly, as she sipped her tea. "The woman at Fan-

shawe's persuaded me to try this style. Do you like it?"

"I think it's immense! I'd like a picture of you that way right now!"

"I am sure you would," she remarked, without expression. Then she bent to pat her dog's head.

"Was he a poor hungry angel?" she crooned. "Did his cruel mistress starve her precious Alibi while she gorged herself on tea? Well, he shall have his bones, so he shall!"

She opened the moist brown-paper parcel and set it down before the dog. Alibi pounced upon the bones hungrily. But a wildly excited French waiter rushed forward.

"But — pardon — madame — mademoiselle! Such is *défendu*—it is not permitted! You must not feed your dog here! Look—already there is a spot on the carpet!"

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Betty apologetically. "Will you take the bones outside, and let him gnaw them on the sidewalk?" She proffered a half dollar as she spoke. "He won't run away while the bones last," she added, smiling.

The waiter, despite a few growls of protest from Alibi, secured the paper containing the feast, and bore it away, with the dog close at his heels. Danny Lonsdell was frankly glad to see the beast go. He was altogether too canny, too much like an especially tricky human being. He had never read the "Arabian Nights;" if he had, he would doubtless have looked upon Alibi as a sort of jinni, or familiar spirit, of Betty's.

With a sense that he and Bet were alone at last, he leaned his arms on the table and looked at her squarely as she lifted her second cup of tea to her lips.

"Betty," he said, "it's no go. You've got to come across sooner or later; it'll be easier for you if you make it sooner. I hate searching a woman, or putting her through the third degree, and—I know you lifted those diamonds at Fanshawe's."

"What makes you think so?" asked she, with perfect composure.

"It's been reported—telephoned in to headquarters fifteen minutes ago. It was darned well done, just as all your jobs are. Old Weldon didn't spot the phony stones you slipped him in exchange for the real ones until he began to look them over with the idea of setting them. About the same time they got wise to your counterfeit century. It was good, slick work, all right; and I take off my hat to you for your coolness and good sense. But—the game's up. You've been shadowed every second. We know every one you've spoken to——"

"Oh, I know that," she interrupted carelessly. "I saw Baby Jane this morning, and that man of yours this afternoon. What sort of creature is he, anyway? A stool pigeon, or just a plain bum detective?"

Her manner had subtly altered, but she was still calm and self-controlled.

"Jane's gone after the young fellow you gave the money to," said Danny. "She——"

Boston Betty threw back her head and laughed long and heartily.

"Oh, but that is rich!" she cried, at last. "Did I really do it as well as that? I wondered whether I couldn't make one of those two idiots leave my trail, just for a lark, and—I did it the first trick out of the box! Poor Baby Jane! I hope she's got plenty of pocket money or extra-good shoes, for that young man told me he lived in Flatbush! I don't know his name."

"The drug store, the butcher, and the florist, are all under surveillance," said Danny Lonsdell, hiding his annoyance as best he could. "We've a man at the charity place checking off every move you made while you were there. But I think that, as usual, you've told the

truth about this: you led Bangs around by way of a lark, and to see if you couldn't bamboozle us. I think that Baby Jane had the right dope when she said she saw you hide the diamonds in your hair."

He thought her face changed. "Did she say that?"

"She did. And I must say it looks puffed out enough to hold anything! Come along, Betty. I'll pay the check—I think that's up to me under the circumstances—and you just come along quietly, and we'll get a police matron to undo that gorgeous hair of yours."

Boston Betty sat perfectly still, looking into her empty teacup, and then she reached for a cigarette. Her hand was trembling slightly.

"Well?" said Lonsdell, watching her.

The cigarette was lighted, but she let it go out before she answered. When she spoke, it was in a low, almost a sullen voice, with no trace of the cheerful bravado which had characterized her attitude before.

"It's all right. Baby Jane had the right dope—up to a certain point. She did see me hide something in my hair. But it wasn't the diamonds. Say, Mr. Lonsdell, I never peached on a pal before, but there are times when you have to save your own skin. You're square—as square as a dick can be, I guess; if I put you wise to—to what I hid, you won't make it harder for me than you can help?"

Her eyes met his suddenly; they were actually pleading.

"I didn't know you worked with a partner, Bet," said Danny.

"No one knows it. But I *do*—or, rather, I *have*. Never again! Well—here's what I hid, and—and I suppose I'm plain rotten to give it to you!"

She slipped her fingers into the crisp black waves under the chic little hat, and pulled out a minute scrap of folded paper. This she handed across the table to the detective, and waited, watching his face anxiously as he examined it.

It was a soiled and cheap-textured scrap, and the writing upon it was a penciled scrawl, hurried and illiterate.

This is what it said:

Received O. K.—Z. will take them.—8 tonight Sixth and 14th.

There was no signature.

Danny Lonsdell stared at the note so long that after a bit Betty ventured a timid "How about it, Mr. Lonsdell?"

"Who's Z.?" demanded the detective.

"I'd rather not tell that," she protested. "It's bad enough to give—*him*—away——"

"Bet, you've got your choice. You can tell me the names and addresses of both these men, or you can go to stir."

"And if I do tell"—she hesitated; her dark eyes were piteous—"do I get off?"

"I suppose so," said Lonsdell curtly. "I know you ought to be arrested anyway, and that I'm a soft-headed fool not to do it, but—well, no one actually saw you steal the jewels, and what you've just done comes mighty near turning State's evidence. Tell me who they are, Betty—your confederate and the fence—and I'll let you make a getaway, and go and keep that little date myself."

"Give me the paper."

Dan handed it over, and she wrote on the back and gave it to him once more. He read:

Abraham Zaborsky, 110 Third Avenue.

"Is he the fence?"

She nodded. "Yes; he's a pawnbroker, too."

"And—the other?"

She dropped her eyes. "His name's John Murphy," she said, in a faint voice.

"He's the guy who wrote this—who's going to meet you at Fourteenth and Sixth? What does he look like?"

"He's tall and fair, and wears a broad-brimmed black hat. And he—he's a little lame, and uses a stick."

Five minutes later, Danny Lonsdell escorted Miss Elizabeth Buxter to a taxi, which had just been called for her, and put her into it—also Alibi, still growlingly clinging to the biggest of the bones on which he had been regaling himself.

The machine rolled off, threading its way between cars and vehicles of all kinds, until Betty rapped on the glass and, alighting, paid and dismissed the driver. After walking half a block, she hailed another taxi.

"Not absolutely necessary, this change," she told Ali, as she settled herself comfortably in the second cab, "but it's always as well to overlook no bets. Ali, darling, I don't know when I've played such a big game as I have to-day, and run such big risks! But I believe, thanks to the inspiration that made me fake that note and invent those two men, I've won out! Ali, love, let's see how well you've taken care of our property."

She bent and took the big beef bone from the dog's jaws. He gave it up immediately to the hand he knew and loved. Then, with a long hat pin from her chic little hat, Miss Buxter began to probe in the hollow usually filled with meat marrow. What she was seeking was clearly deeply fixed inside the bone, but she achieved her object at last—four perfect diamonds which rolled out of the bone into her lap and lay there sparkling in the glimmering lights the taxi was passing.

"Stuck fast, just as I knew they would," she murmured. "That was some inspiration, Ali! It was a chance, of course, letting you take the haul out to the sidewalk, but—it's a safe bet that a dog will always hang onto the biggest bone in sight, whatever happens, and you couldn't have cracked this unless you'd been a Bengal tiger!" She leaned back and, picking up the jewels, smiled happily.

"I hope it won't be very cold and windy on the corner of Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue!" she murmured comfortably. "Danny Lonsdell is a good sort, and I'd hate to have him catch pneumonia, waiting for my imaginary partner! 'A little lame, and uses a stick'—my word! . . . Ali, dearest, *now* you may have your bone again! You've earned it!"

GUNMAN GUILTY OF SLAYING POLICEMAN

BROOKLYN justice moved with oiled wheels in the case of Jacob Cohen, who killed Policeman Rosenfeld while holding up the Twenty-first Assembly District Republican Club, New York. He was found guilty of murder in the first degree, after a trial lasting twenty-four hours. The crime was committed on the night of February 13th.

The policeman went to the club, No. 135 Leonard Street, in response to an alarm of an invasion by bandits. He found several members lined up against the walls by two gunmen, of whom Cohen was the chief.

Rosenfeld drew his revolver and called upon the bandits to surrender. Cohen's reply was a bullet, which killed the policeman. Two weeks later he confessed to the district attorney. He implicated two others, who are awaiting trial. Cohen said it was planned, in case of failure, to pretend the holdup was a joke.

In the Fog

by Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

CHAPTER I.

THE DESERTED HOUSE.

OF course, if Tatlow had not lost his way that dull November afternoon, none of us would have been mixed up in the sensational Luttrell case. But Tatlow usually lost his way, so we can scarcely lay it to chance, either.

We were en route for the Orchils' summer camp on the edge of the Adirondacks for a Thanksgiving house party: Betty Blakely, Molly Sheerness, the Tatlows, Carstairs, young Doctor Kennard, and myself. Mrs. Tatlow had been fussing at her husband about losing the way, but as the Tatlows quarreled all the time, no one paid much attention to them.

It was after luncheon, at a fair-sized little inn at Bageport, that the fog began to creep around us, and Betty Blakely drew up the lynx furs closer about her pretty face. I am engaged to Molly, myself, but still I can see how lovely Betty Blakely is, and apparently Carstairs and Kennard were aware of it, too.

We were rather a strangely assorted carload of people to be headed straight for an experience we were to be compelled to live through together, and that none of us, not even my fun-loving Molly, was ever to forget.

"Dickens of a day to ride, isn't it?" Carstairs asked, pulling up his collar. "And there's a fog coming, I note."

"It will be delightful if Jamison keeps to the road," said Mrs. Tatlow provokingly. "He never has yet."

"The only time a woman thinks a man's a human being," growled Tatlow, "is just before she marries him and just after he's dead. That is not my own. Wish it were. Read it somewhere."

"Are you right so far, Tatlow?" I asked, for I'd ridden in the Tatlow car before.

"Of course I am." The driver looked around with a grunt. "Never saw such a bunch of people to take anywhere. Didn't have any peace until I got this car, and haven't had any since I've had it. I know where I am."

"There is some kind of a dog, I believe, Tatlow," suggested Kennard, with that dry humor of his, "that always points its nose to the west or the east, I forget which. It would be handy to have one of them, wouldn't it?"

Tatlow grunted again and kept silent. The road grew momentarily more submerged in the thick, wet fog, which was closing about us, and Tatlow turned on his lights without a word.

"Jamison," fretted his wife, "something tells me you have no idea where you are this moment."

No reply from the driver, who sent the big car steadily ahead.

"Wasn't it in a fog you met Doris Luttrell, Hal?" Molly asked Carstairs then, as if prompted by some imp.

"Yes," replied Carstairs shortly.

"So romantic it was," went on Molly, with a laugh. "Their cars collided, and, though she was so much older than our Hal, still in that dim, foggy haze he thought——"

"I think," broke in Carstairs

abruptly, displeased at her teasing tone, "every one knows that ridiculous story."

Halstead Carstairs, who was one of the typical, much-sought-after, small-town bachelors, and who had lorded it for years over the fair sex in Wedgely, had had an affair with Mrs. Luttrell, from which he had just escaped with a whole reputation. It was still town talk, and his chances with Betty Blakely had been rather small ever since.

"Seen her lately, Hal?" asked Tatlow idly.

"No—not for weeks," replied Carstairs, and turned his face to the fog blanket.

It must have been an hour or so after this that we drove through the heavy, wet darkness without a word; the atmosphere was depressing.

"Jamison, do you know where you are?" exploded Mrs. Tatlow, when the car stopped with a jolt.

"Haven't for an hour or more," admitted Tatlow, turning with a large grin and a mighty stretch.

"Why didn't you stop, then, man?" I cried.

"What for? Couldn't see anything, and the best way to get anywhere is to keep going. Kennard, you were so da—er—so dashed smart about these roads before we started, now get out and hunt a signpost or a house, and I'll keep the Klaxon going until you get back."

"Do you want me along?" I asked, but Mrs. Tatlow protested:

"Oh, no, we can't lose all our men. Who knows what may happen?"

"True, and what is one little life like mine?" asked Kennard, as he dropped to the ground. "Nothing—practically nothing."

"Nary a post or a port as far as I can see," he reported, when he returned. "Met a tree down the road a bit, but, though it barked my shins, it told me nothing."

Tatlow started the car slowly.

"No man could keep to one of these fool country roads in a mist like this," he grunted.

"You know you were off the road before any one thought of fog," said his wife wearily. "You always get lost."

It was some time later that Kennard spoke again.

"There is a light over there, I think," he said, nodding to the right. "I move we investigate. It is dangerous, anyhow, running a car through this overstrange road."

Tatlow stopped again. "Well, Tom, Hal and you go over and have a look, and I'll keep the Klaxon going——" he suggested.

I often wonder just how far Carstairs would have eventually been mixed up in the thing if he had remained in the car and allowed me to go in his place as I wished.

"He's a smart man, that Kennard chap," said Tatlow when the two had disappeared. "Now I'll know something."

"According to that," snapped his wife, "you will be a changed man in a few minutes."

"I never was much for these modern inventions," I said gloomily. "Give me the good old horse every time. All we'd have to do now would be to give him his head and he'd take us home."

"Kennard and you appear to be quite up on animals," said Tatlow disagreeably.

"Jamison Tatlow," said his wife tartly, "if we can't go on and there is no place for us to go in, may I ask what we are to do?"

"You may," replied her husband, and began to sound the Klaxon.

After an interminable time, Kennard and Carstairs suddenly appeared beside us.

"That's a funny thing," said Kennard. "Jolly big house down there in the hollow—front door open—lights in the hall—whole place empty. Hal and I went through it, lighting up."

"The people are doubtless about somewhere," said Carstairs, out of the gloom, and even then I thought his voice was strained. "I think we might as well run the car in there until they return. Any one would give us house room."

"Mercy, there must be something queer about it," quavered Mrs. Tatlow. "I've read of horrible things that people have stumbled upon in places like that."

"There is nothing there," said Kennard sharply. "Carstairs and I went all over the house. Probably the servants or some of the family have returned by this time."

"But the front door open—ugh!" said Molly.

"Well, there was a fire in the hall, that looked good to me," said Kennard. "The only sensible thing to do is to drive in. This fog won't lift to-night."

"Sure we'll go in," spoke Tatlow suddenly. "Maybe we can phone the Orchils from there."

The house, a wide, spacious country mansion, was set in a grove of great trees; and though Tatlow kept the Klaxon going as they approached, and though the great white eyes of his car swept the house in a circle of hazy light, when we stopped before the door no one appeared to bid us enter, though somewhere in the rear a dog barked, in deep, irritated gasps, as though he tugged at a chain.

The door still stood open, and while Tatlow and Kennard took the car around back in search of a garage or stable, Carstair and I told the three women to make themselves at home before the fire.

"That fire is hours old," I told Carstairs, as we took off our greatcoats and sweaters. "Where do you fancy these people are?"

"I don't know where they are, but I know where more wood is," said Carstairs, with a kind of nervous cheerfulness, and replenished the fire with logs, which he took from a beaten-brass chest beside it.

Betty sat on a hassock near by and watched him.

"Hal," she asked suddenly, "did you and Doctor Kennard go all over this house?"

"All over it, yes," he replied.

"And you saw no one, and everything was in order?"

Her eyes never left his face. Something about Betty always compelled the truth.

"No one," he replied again.

"You didn't answer all my question."

"Well, I can't say—I never saw the house before. I don't know where things belong," he evaded.

Mrs. Tatlow rose with a scream.

"Tell us what you found!" she cried hysterically.

"Nothing; perhaps," replied Carstairs impatiently, "just a woman's room with things—er—everyhow."

"No—bodies about?"

"Certainly not!" Carstairs flushed, and turned away to the telephone, from which I had been endeavoring to get a reply from central.

"What is the matter with this thing, do you suppose?" I asked.

"Probably the wires have been cut by the murderer," suggested Molly, and Mrs. Tatlow screamed again, glancing over her shoulder.

However, the telephone wouldn't work, and after a time we gave it up, I for one regarding the whole affair as a bit past the class of coincidences, and rather inclined, with Mrs. Tatlow, to look for the remains.

There was an excellent garage, Tatlow and Kennard reported a few moments later, but it was absolutely

empty, and a mastiff, who appeared to object to them strongly, was chained to a dog house near it.

Just then the great clock on the stairs chimed ten.

I had reason to remember it because the chimes were unusually beautiful, and we spoke of them. The women had taken off their wraps and were sitting about the fire Carstairs had remade, when Betty stooped suddenly and from under the edge of a Navaho blanket, flung across a divan, she drew forth a woman's slipper, a tiny white satin beaded thing, with a ridiculous spike of a heel.

"Just where she kicked it off as she sat by the fire," said Molly. "Can't you see her?"

"Kicked it off," repeated Mrs. Tatlow, with a shudder.

"She was carried off—dead or alive!"

Betty shivered, and dropped the slipper.

"This is the crowning tangle you've ever gotten us into, Jamison Tatlow," said his wife. "I'll never get in that car again with you at the wheel."

As she spoke, a Klaxon sounded just outside on the drive. There was the pur of a running motor, and Tatlow and I sprang to the door just in time to see a huge dark shape with a red tail light disappear into the dense fog.

Indeed, as we stood out there in the dampness, the Klaxon sounded again, muffled, and yet oddly defiant.

"Holy smoke—you probably won't, Bessie," gasped Tatlow, turning to his wife, "for that was our car, or I'll eat my hat!"

CHAPTER II.

THE OTHER SLIPPER.

JOVE, that's a queer go!" said Kennard, with a frown.

"Come on, Tom, let's see for ourselves; there's mischief somewhere!" cried Tatlow excitedly.

Before any one could protest, Tatlow and Kennard plunged out into the thick darkness.

"Some one must have been lurking about all this time," said Mrs. Tatlow, with a shudder, fishing for her smelling salts in the huge bag she had brought from the car. "Some one who *wanted to get away!*"

I happened to be looking at Carstairs, and I wondered vaguely why his hands shook as he held a lighted match to his cigarette. Of course, the whole thing was a bit upsetting, but not quite bad enough to make a man as nervous as Carstairs appeared to be.

When the men returned, Kennard shook his head ruefully.

"Garage door open—no one in sight—car clean gone!" he admitted.

"Nobody heard that dog bark, though, did they?" I asked suddenly. "And he has yelled his throat sore every time *we've* moved."

"Ye gods, Peter," said Tatlow, "I didn't know you had it in you—forget the wretched past!"

"Result of brilliant summing up of case," said Kennard, with an elaborate bow to me, "the dog knew the man who stole your car!"

"Man!" snorted Molly, and glanced at the slipper.

"Oh, she's the one they've killed," said Mrs. Tatlow. "We'll find her somewhere presently."

"Great Scott, Bessie, don't have hysterics!" said Tatlow.

"Come on, let's raid the larder; I'm half starved."

As we started kitchenward, I noticed that Betty Blakely was regarding Carstairs in an odd, puzzled sort of way. He was staring at his half smoked cigarette, and his face was ghastly.

There was so much in the pantries to eat that we fell to, almost ravenously. And Betty made coffee on the gas stove, while Molly and I sat on the

kitchen table. The Tatlows and Carstairs drank more black coffee than we could keep track of.

"We'll let the ladies and Tatlow go upstairs and try to sleep," Kennard told me, as he watched Molly and Betty wash the dishes. "Carstairs and you and I can keep watch below here. To tell you the truth, Drayne, I don't half like the looks of things, and I'd give a lot to be out of it."

"Same here," I replied heartily. "That car business got my goat. Looks bad, that does. Whoever took it was here all the time we were—here probably while Hal and you were going about the place."

"That's what I think."

"What is the upstairs like?"

"Beautifully furnished, nothing disturbed—at least only in one room—a woman's room—things are mussed up a bit in there."

"We've got to search the house before we let the girls go up there," I said. "You said you looked over it, but did you? That is—under things—in closets, and so forth?"

Kennard looked at me in frank disgust.

"Great Scott, you're as bad as Mrs. Tatlow!" he told me. "What on earth do you expect to find?"

"I don't know," I replied. "But it's all queer enough to suit me. All it needs is the remains, then our little party is complete."

Accordingly, Kennard and I went over the house. The door of the boudoir, which Kennard had described as "mussed up," we closed, after a long, frowning survey of the open dresser drawers and womanly trinkets flung about on sofa, bureau, and floor. A suit case stood, half filled, near the dressing table.

"In a hurry, wasn't she, the lady of the tiny slipper?" Kennard asked, as we looked.

I shook my head. "Well, anyhow, it isn't here."

"It? The chap who took our car was running away from?"

"Rats!" snapped Kennard.

We finally got the ladies and Tatlow to go upstairs, although Mrs. Tatlow protested that she should not shut an eye. Tatlow muttered something about her mouth and grumblingly followed her.

"Might as well sleep on this, I guess," said Kennard, as he flung some cushions on a divan, "though I could think of a lot of other places where I'd rather be. Afraid we won't be able to report, when we recover from this week-end party, that a delightful time was had by all."

I had been turning the little slipper about in my hand, and now I looked up at Kennard.

"The lady who wore this was small and fair," I told him. "She had on a blue satin dress, or a blue satin something, when she lost this slipper; she is of an extremely nervous temperament, and very fond of dancing."

"Good heavens!" gasped Kennard. "Are you one of those things, Drayne?"

I tossed the little slipper aside.

"No, but it is safe to say that the owner of that is small," I replied. "She is fair, because she wore blue. Also, that she wore blue, because I find a shred or two of blue satin caught in the beads of the slipper. Also, that she is extremely nervous, because the pearls and satin are torn and worn on the side where the other little foot has rubbed incessantly against it as she sat. And the dancing, see how the tiny heel still retains particles of wax, practically ground in, and how the sole is worn in a way that only constant use on a ballroom floor will wear a thing of this sort."

"There's a magnifying glass on the table, Peter, if you care to go over the

floor with it," suggested Kennard, with a yawn.

I don't know why I did not compose myself to sleep as the other men did; possibly because I had always had a taste for this sort of thing, and that here in this house, mystery, and possibly crime, seemed to me to stalk at our elbows. I cannot say why I felt so strangely as I sat by that dying fire, with Kennard snoring gently on the divan in the library door and Carstairs lying in the shadow on the other side of the fitful flames. I could not see whether he slept or not. At any rate, I myself was far from it when suddenly a woman's scream woke every distant echo in the silent house.

We were all on our feet immediately. There was a sound of running steps in the hall above, and Molly, fully dressed, bent over the wide stair rail.

"Boys," she cried hysterically, "come up—there is some one in my room!"

Now, I was engaged to Molly, it is true, and I loved her as much as any man ever loved the girl he expects to marry; yet when she called for help, I let the other two men go to her, and stood still by the fire, listening. And presently, through the jumble of voices upstairs, I heard it; a stealthy step at the back of the house, the kitchens probably, and, as I darted noiselessly in that direction, the swift closing of a door, the click of a latch, and then silence.

It was only a second later that I flung open the kitchen door, but it was a second too late. The dense veil of fog that had been responsible for all our mishaps had swallowed up whatever had fled so swiftly from Molly's room, and as I stood puzzled and helpless, in the doorway, my eyes became riveted upon something that lay at my feet.

It was the mate to the little white satin slipper, and when I stooped to pick it up I had to loosen the tiny heel from the strip of torn oilcloth, which had evidently pulled it from its owner's foot.

But the slipper I held differed from the dainty bit of white satin by the fire, in that its sole was caked with mud, and its pearls and satin sadly soiled.

She had had a key, of course, to the back door—the little lady of the slipper—but—Kennard and I had locked the kitchen door, and the key was still in the lock! How, then, had she gotten in?

They were all by the fire in the hall when I reached it, and Molly was talking rapidly.

"I was asleep," she was saying, "when I heard some one open the door. I was almost petrified, too scared to waken Betty, and I lay there and watched a dark figure steal past the end of the bed. I screamed then, and the figure turned and ran, but the queerest part of it is that it was a woman. She had on a dark cloak of some sort, but I heard her skirts as she went. They were silk. Do you suppose she could have been—this one?"

She glanced at the slipper on the hassock.

"I've no doubt she was," I replied quietly, "for she lost the mate to that in the kitchen just now when she shut the door in my face."

"Holy smoke!" gasped Kennard, and collapsed beside the slipper.

"Ugh!" cried Mrs. Tatlow. "There is mud on it—see what Mr. Drayne has! Did any of you ever see such a house as this? My nerves are ruined for the rest of my life."

"Careless with her feet, isn't she?" asked Kennard.

"But now—why, now she must be near us this minute, out in the fog, alone!" cried Betty softly. "And in her stocking feet—poor little thing!"

"What is there for her to be so afraid of?" shuddered Molly.

"We don't know," said Mrs. Tatlow darkly.

"Well, she does," said I. "I never knew any one to run like her."

"Can't see how she got in," I went on. "I locked up, myself."

"Well, anyhow, nobody has murdered her," said Tatlow. "And she didn't steal my car."

"And the dog knows her," added Betty.

"Tell you what"—Kennard picked up the slippers—"I'm going out and invite her in. She probably has more right here than we have."

"I'll go with you," said Betty, with sudden animation. "She may not understand that we are friends."

We heard Kennard calling out the kitchen door:

"Won't you come in? We have taken very rude possession of your house, we know—but we'll be gone in the morning, and in the meantime we are friends."

"And we have your slippers," added Betty. "Do, please, come in out of the wet!"

Whenever I think now of those two calling that way into the fog, it makes my hair rise.

After several futile attempts, they set the slippers out on the kitchen step, locked the door, and came back to us.

"Nice, cozy little place this," Kennard said, with a grin. "Makes a chap long for a home of his own, eh, Carstairs?"

He looked sharply at Carstairs, who had been noticeably silent through experiences that would have drawn at least an exclamation from the veriest grouch alive.

"What ails the chump?" I asked Kennard. "He acts sick, or scared to death."

"Haven't any idea," said Kennard, regarding Carstairs quizzically. "When we first came down here to the house he was all right."

"Maybe," I suggested, "he knows the slippers."

Carstairs had a rather lurid past.

Kennard laughed. "Not likely. Your work on the *Evening News* teaches you to read a story everywhere, Peter."

"No, not always," I said; "but it teaches us to read human nature, and there's something wrong with Carstairs. Something worse than your making eyes at Betty Blakely."

"What!" snapped Kennard, in amazement, but I only laughed at him and went over to say good night to Molly for the second time.

"I feel," said Mrs. Tatlow, with a shudder, "as if I had stepped within the leaves of some perfectly terrible detective book."

"Well," said her husband, with a wide yawn, "I hope nobody turns one over until I get a nap."

CHAPTER III.

FOUND DEAD.

I WENT out to the kitchen early the next morning, thinking that I would explore the gardens a bit, and found Kennard already there with Betty Blakely. She was busied about getting breakfast, and they were both inclined to laugh at the grewsome adventures of the night before, and the strange oppression that had seemed to weigh us all down.

The fog had lifted, and a cold November sun shone calmly down on the hills and the picturesque grounds about us.

"Come out!" Kennard called us from the drive. "This is a delightful place, wherever it is."

"Isn't it?" cried Betty. "Oh, listen—the dog still barks, when we stir about, outside the house!"

I followed Betty and Kennard, as they walked down the drive and around the side of the garage to the dog house,

where a handsome mastiff stood pulling against his chain and barking hoarsely.

"What a beauty!" said Betty, and went forward a step, and then quite suddenly her hand flew to her throat and she swayed dizzily, staring down at the woman who lay at her feet.

A few paces from the dog house she lay, so that the dog could not see her, but he was vividly alive to her presence, nevertheless.

"Oh!" cried Betty.

Kennard was kneeling beside the little figure, his practiced hand on her heart, under the heavy fur coat she wore.

"She has been dead for hours," he told us, when he rose to his feet. "She has been stabbed, straight through the heart, too."

"There seems to be no dagger or knife anywhere around," I said quietly, for I had somehow been looking for this all along, and was not much surprised.

I walked around to where I could get a glimpse of the woman's face, and stood looking down at her, keenly alive to each detail. Somehow or other, things of this sort had always had a strange fascination for me, though I was but a harmless member of the staff of the *Evening News*, and had never, up to this, come face to face with crime in such a personal way.

At this moment Betty Blakely came to my side and stared down at the face of the silent figure at our feet. A rather pretty face, it was, and she was handsomely but quietly dressed. I imagined she was easily forty years of age.

"Why—Doctor Kennard—Peter—this is Mrs. Luttrell!" cried Betty. Then: "You remember—we were—Molly was asking Hal Carstairs about her. What can she be doing here?"

"You forget," I said a bit grimly, "we do not know where 'here' is yet."

Betty seemed frozen with horror, staring down at the form at her feet. The dog barked hoarsely.

"Could it have happened while we were here?" she breathed. "Might the man have taken Mr. Tatlow's car?"

"No," said Kennard. "I should say she was dead when we came."

"But the slippers—and the woman you followed—the woman Molly saw," Betty faltered.

"Odd as it may seem, it could not have been this one," said Kennard, shaking his head. "She has been dead a long time—possibly since early in the evening."

Stooping, I looked at the two small feet which protruded from beneath the stylish cloth gown. They were shod in high suède boots.

I went back to the kitchen step then, on an impulse, and glanced where Betty and Kennard had set those slippers the night before. They were gone.

"They're not there," said Kennard, behind me. "This is, I'm afraid, rather a mess."

"Do you suppose a woman has done this—this awful thing?" quivered Betty at our side. "How did Doris Luttrell get here at all? And where is here? And how on earth did those slippers get away in that dreadful fog?"

"Heaven knows," said Kennard, "and perhaps the dog. We can't telephone from here, but, Peter, you get the men up and I'll go to the next place, if there is any, and find a telephone. The police will have to be notified, and don't—er—touch Mrs. Luttrell until they get here."

Kennard was gone a long time, a very long time, when it is taken into consideration that the party had not breakfasted, and, on top of that, had just discovered a murder in its midst.

No one showed the slightest inclination to touch Mrs. Luttrell's body; on the contrary, after the first horror-stricken look, they all betrayed a de-

sire to keep as far away from the figure on the path as possible.

Mrs. Tatlow was noisily hysterical, and Halstead Carstairs appeared utterly shaken, was white as chalk, and paced the kitchen incessantly. Which was, perhaps, not to be wondered at, since he had known the dead woman so well at one time. Still, I watched Carstairs—he puzzled me, somehow.

"Whoever heard of starting out to a peaceful, decent house party, and getting mixed up in a thing like this?" wailed Mrs. Tatlow. "We'll all be suspected, of course, and everybody'll know everything on earth about us all. They even find out why your grandfather smoked a pipe—and all sorts of intimate things like that."

No one thought of smiling at her. No future seemed too dark and uncomfortable to believe in just then. I felt rather gloomy myself.

Then Kennard came back and informed us that we were at the Thurman place, just outside Chester; that Mr. and Mrs. Thurman had gone away for Thanksgiving, and given the servants a holiday also, all save Lamont, a trusted butler, who had remained to feed the dog and take care of the place; and that he, Kennard, had notified the police, and had had a most unsatisfactory long-distance chat with Taylor Orchil.

"He wants us to come on as soon as we can," Kennard told us.

"Good heavens! *Come on!*" cried Mrs. Tatlow. "Did you tell Taylor Orchil, Doctor Kennard, that he would very likely have to bail us all out, or whatever it is they do with people who are not used to jails?"

"I did not," said Kennard dryly. "I think he thought I was crazy, anyhow. We had an awful connection."

He turned suddenly and looked at Carstairs.

"Hal, did Mrs. Luttrell know the Thurmans?" he asked quietly. "Or did you ever hear of them?"

Carstairs lifted his dull eyes.

"No, never heard of them," he replied. "I don't know all Mrs. Luttrell's friends."

"Oh," said Betty Blakely, "were they her friends?"

Carstairs turned, met Betty's wide eyes and the sneer left his lips.

"I never heard her speak of them," he said gravely, and sank into a big chair by the fire which I had endeavored to keep going in the hall.

"I think," said Kennard, "that the thing to do is to find Lamont. He was left in charge here. Where is he? He took your car, Tatlow, and skedaddled. That's what Lamont did. He's your man."

"Butlers don't kill ladies and leave a rope of pearls on their necks and a fortune in rings on their fingers," said Molly severely.

"Nevertheless," said Kennard, with a beautiful consistency, "Lamont's your man."

Kennard was sitting, elbows on knees, his long brown, capable hands loosely clasped, his eyes on Carstairs, who sat hunched up in the huge chair by the fire.

There was a frown on Kennard's lips, even as he spoke so lightly.

I saw Betty's bright eyes go from one man to the other, and she looked at me and shook her head, as I turned sharply from the window.

"Here come your police, I guess," I told them. "A car full of men, at any rate, Kennard."

Tatlow pulled aside the velvet curtains.

"By George!" he cried excitedly. "Bessie, they've got our car in tow!"

"Maybe they stole it in the first place," said Kennard darkly. "Awful thieves, some of 'em."

Molly flung him a disgusted look.

"Tom, how can you be frivolous—*now?*" she asked.

"My good child," said Doctor Kennard, as he settled himself more comfortably in the big chair opposite Carstairs, who neither moved nor spoke, "murder may have been done in my vicinity, but I never saw the lady, nor do I feel in the least bit guilty."

CHAPTER IV.

CONTRADICTIONS.

ON high days and holidays, evenings and Sundays, all along the social paths of life, Inspector Samson and Levering West, the detective who had of late years sprung into such fame, were the warmest and most intimate of friends. In business they were good-natured but determined enemies and rivals.

Inspector Samson's mother lived ten miles outside Chester, and the next day being Thanksgiving, West was spending it at the Samson home. Thus it chanced, by one of those happy coincidences, that both men were in the car which paused with a choked-off cough before the door of the Thurman house that sunnily cold November day.

There was a physician and two officers with West and Samson, young men who looked upon their distinguished companions with awe. Once let a hardened criminal learn that Inspector Samson was on his trail, and he knew that his name was Dennis, nationality having nothing whatever to do with it.

Doctor Johnson agreed with Kennard that Mrs. Luttrell had been dead for hours, death possibly occurring before ten o'clock the preceding night, certainly not after ten. The body was brought in and laid on the couch in the library, and covered with the Navaho blanket.

Tatlow's car, they informed him, had been found. It had been run into a ditch, was absolutely intact, but gasolineless, about five miles down the road. They had had an idea it was the missing machine, and had towed it along.

"You see," West said to Tatlow, "that it has either been abandoned because it ran out of gas, or it has been left in the ditch with the motor going until it ran out itself."

"Heavens, man," exploded Tatlow, "I had it filled up at two in the afternoon over at Bageport."

West shrugged his shoulders. "Then the thief must have had a joy ride in the fog," he replied, apparently dismissing the subject.

He spent almost an hour alone in the stable yard after they moved Mrs. Luttrell's body, and I chanced to meet him at the door when he finally returned. I felt a certain interest in this man, whose clever work I had heard so much about.

"We're all ready for the third degree in the hall, here," I told him, "and your friend in the fur coat is about to begin."

"Well," drawled Levering West, with the smile that made his gaunt face so charming, "I've been talking to the dog. Nice, sociable old chap."

"I guess if you've got the dog to talk, you know it all," I returned, as we joined the others about the fire.

Inspector Samson and West listened with great interest to the story we had to tell, putting in sharp questions here and there. The house and grounds had been subjected to an exhaustive examination before we had been assembled in the hall, and it was long past the luncheon hour.

Betty and Mrs. Tatlow felt weak and faint, but Molly, who was forever dieting to reduce her dainty plumpness, joyed in the forced fasting. I was starving, and put in a plaintive appeal now and then. So that presently Betty and Molly went to the kitchens and made coffee and platters of sandwiches.

There were all sorts of dainties in the refrigerators, almost as though the house had been stocked for a feast; all of which the keen-eyed men of the law took careful note of.

By the time the lunch had been consumed, the inspector and West were in full possession of all that we could tell them. Carstairs had roused himself somewhat, and had replied to questions frankly and laconically. I noted that Kennard refrained from looking at the inspector or West.

Finally Samson sat back and looked across the fire at West with a twinkle in his eye.

"Mysterious enough for you?" he asked, and West nodded.

"Quite. Of course, we can't do a great deal here. There are too many trails outside to follow. The Lamont one, the Thurman one, the Luttrell one. By the way, has any one sent word to the Thurmans?"

"Brants—that is, the neighbors where I was this morning, sent a telegram to Mrs. Thurman's mother in New York, where I believe Mrs. Thurman is staying," said Kennard.

"Mr. Carstairs, you said you knew this little widow very well at one time. How long since you lost track of her?"

"Several months. She sold her home in Wedgely and went away."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

Betty frowned suddenly, her lips apart, and a warm flush swept over her pale face. I knew she was hearing Tatlow's teasing question to Carstairs the day before in the machine. I was, at any rate. "Seen her lately, Hal?" and Carstairs' short reply: "No—not for weeks."

"Yes, Miss Blakley?" asked West quietly, and Betty bit her lip.

"I—it was nothing. Something I was going to ask," she faltered, and Levering West apparently paid her no more attention.

"Now, Doctor Kennard, while the inspector is busy with Doctor Johnson in there, will you tell me, please, something else about this first visit that Mr. Carstairs and you paid this house last night? Did you remain together all the time, and did you visit the gardens or take a look at the dog? But perhaps he was not barking then?"

"He barked," said Kennard briefly, and I saw his hand close suddenly on the arm of his chair. It is possible that the half-closed eyes of West, through the haze of smoke, noted it also.

"Ah! And the rest of my question, Doctor Kennard?"

"We simply looked over the house. It struck us queer that the door should be open and no one around. So we went over the house and turned on lights. We didn't go out in the fog unnecessarily or bother with the dog."

"I see." Levering West's eyes twinkled. "And what did *you* do while Mr. Carstairs was away from you, Doctor Kennard?"

Kennard flung up his head sharply.

"I don't remember telling you that he was away from me." He set his firm lips over the words.

I sat forward. So that was it!

"You did, though you possibly were not aware of it. It is best to be frank at the start. We shall all have to work together. Will you answer, please?"

Kennard did not look at Carstairs.

"Mr. Carstairs said he would go back to the car and tell Tatlow to come in. It was foolish for us both to go. I was up in the boudoir looking at the things flung around, and he went on down."

"Then?"

"Well, I—— See here, Mr. West! Carstairs had no more to do with this thing than you had, and I hate to mix him up in it," Kennard blurted out, and Carstairs crossed the room and held out his hand.

"Thanks, Kennard," he said quietly,

"but I can finish this myself. I came downstairs"—he turned to West—"meaning to go out to the car. I could hear the Klaxon all the time. I heard a door close, back toward the kitchens, and I thought one of the servants had returned, so I went back there, not trying to go quietly. I had only got to the pantry door when something flew past my head and landed with a crash in the sink. It was one of those weights that is used at times to hold open swinging doors. It is in the sink yet—I left it there and beat it out to the fog, where I knew my assailant must have gone. I heard the kitchen door bang shut. Of course, out in that fog I couldn't see a thing, and I came back and met Kennard in the hall."

"Doctor Kennard, did you hear the crash and the bang as Mr. Carstairs describes them?" asked Levering West. "From anywhere upstairs you should have heard them plainly."

Kennard looked uncomfortable.

"No, I did not. But——"

"And why;" interrupted West, "did you not tell Doctor Kennard or any one else about this?"

"I was afraid of scaring the girls, and I knew we had to spend a night here."

Betty drew in her breath with a gasp; she did not believe a word Carstairs had said, and neither did I.

"Doctor Kennard, how long was Mr. Carstairs away from you?" asked West.

"Oh, I can't judge. Some little time. Fifteen minutes, possibly."

"What! And was he in the hall when you came down?"

"No—I—er—looked about for him a short time."

"Didn't you hear anything during that time?"

"I heard Tatlow's Klaxon going."

"Nothing else?"

"Yes, I believe the dog was barking."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing." But Kennard's honest eyes did not meet the detective's.

"Doctor Kennard," said West quietly, "I am afraid you will have to tell me. You do not lie well."

"It was nothing," said Kennard, flushing, "I could not even swear to it. But I thought I heard a woman's voice somewhere in the back of the house."

"An ordinary speaking voice?"

"No, rather shrill, and—er—frightened. Carstairs came in soon after. I had stopped to listen a moment, and then started for the kitchens. I asked him if he had heard it, and he said he had not."

"What excuse did he give for not going to Mr. Tatlow?"

"He said he had fancied he heard some one walk in the back of the house and had gone to investigate."

"Mr. Carstairs, where were you all that time?" asked West sharply.

"Looking around, I suppose. I've told you what I did," said Carstairs sullenly.

"And you did not hear the woman's voice Doctor Kennard describes?"

"No."

West rose with a yawn.

"Well, good folk, I see no reason why you may not go on your way in peace. We will look you up for the inquest. But meanwhile we have our work cut out—eh, Sammy?"

Inspector Samson turned from the library door with a grin.

"Who is running this case, Levering?" he asked.

"Both of us, if we can," West grinned back.

"I'll have to be towed to some gas," said Tatlow, and one of the young officers volunteered to take the car into Chester.

It was decided after an animated argument for and against, to go on and spend Thanksgiving with the Orchils, as we had planned; and though we rather expected Carstairs to drop out,

just why we could not have said, he showed every intention of remaining with us.

"My *aunt!*" Kennard said to me, as we got our coats. "If I didn't know I hadn't done this thing, I'd be sure I had! That West chap would——"

Molly nodded at him over my shoulder as she got into her coat.

"Tommy," she said gently, "I am afraid all this is being too much for you."

Just the same, I didn't envy Carstairs as we went out to the car, and I think we all regarded him a bit suspiciously.

CHAPTER V.

A PRIVATE INVESTIGATION.

THE inquest, held a few days later, and to which we all looked forward with mingled interest and apprehension, brought to light no new developments in the strange case.

Mr. and Mrs. Thurman were present, both showing the effects of the shock they had sustained, but causing more consternation by their testimony than would have been caused by their absence. For both swore that they had never heard of Doris Luttrell, and knew absolutely nothing about the case or their butler, Lamont, whose strange disappearance they were unable to account for.

Mrs. Thurman was a sweet-faced little lady, who spoke in a low, peculiarly charming voice, and Mr. Thurman was the usual type of the successful American gentleman, a man about thirty-five, tall, slight, and well groomed. Mrs. Thurman testified that nothing had been taken from her home, and that she could no more explain the disorder of her boudoir than she could explain the rest of the mystery.

Her cook and waitress had returned, but they were closing the house that day and leaving for her mother's in New York. She could not bear to stay in the place, she said, with a shudder, and especially now, with the police around.

Asked for information regarding Lamont, Mr. Thurman said that he was a man of perhaps forty-five, an Englishman, and had been with them ten years. They knew nothing about his people or him, having obtained the servant from an employment agency, but had always supposed him to be a bachelor. He had seldom gone out, and had had no company that they knew of.

Mrs. Thurman said they trusted him absolutely, and were much worried about him, since none of his clothes were missing.

Samson and West knew this, and also that there had been nothing in the house that could give a possible clew to Lamont.

The cook and waitress, when questioned, knew no more about Lamont than his employers did. He appeared to have been a man of very solitary habits.

Kennard's evidence was given with obvious reluctance, and told against Carstairs, who sat silently between Betty and Mrs. Tatlow. There was a bad hour while they questioned Kennard and Carstairs, but no new evidence was brought forward.

Carstairs stuck to his story with a sullenness that did not favorably impress his listeners.

I could feel that somehow, and I was glad I had nothing to tell that would weigh against the man any further.

"I say, Kennard," I remarked, as we filed out after the verdict—"Death at the hands of a person or persons unknown"—had been brought in, "I say, this thing begins to interest me a whole lot. They'll have old Carstairs in irons before long if they keep on. 'Pon my soul, I was afraid to hear the verdict.

Say—honest—Tom—do you think Carstairs——"

"No," said Kennard positively, "I don't believe he had a blamed thing to do with it."

"But then——" I began, and looked up into the smiling eyes of Levering West, who nodded and hurried past. "Tom," I continued, as we emerged into the fresh air, "that man has my goat tied in his back yard. Tell me, honest, Kennard—no one is near now—do you think——"

"No," said Kennard again. "He didn't do it—I feel very sure, Peter. But he knows a good bit he isn't telling. You remember I said I heard a woman's voice in the back of the house?"

"Yes."

"Well—I heard Carstairs answer her."

"Great Scott, Tom!" I exploded. "What—what did he say?"

"I didn't hear what he said, but I know he answered her."

"Do you suppose he's shielding her?" I asked.

"Not Carstairs," said Kennard, with quiet contempt.

"Well, but—— Great Scott, Kennard, let's you and I do a little detective work on our own! What do you say? I'm pretty curious about this thing."

"All right," said Kennard amusedly. "Where shall we begin?"

"Let's get into the Thurman house to-night. The Thurmans say it is closed. They've gone on to New York now. Maybe there is something the police have missed; we might get an idea how to start. They say—er—murderers return to the—er—place, you know. Maybe Lamont—— What do you say?"

"Br-r-r!" shivered Kennard. "Really, Peter, old chap, I don't care for it. Besides, the house is under guard."

"Piffle!" I said, with an elegant disregard of the law. "We can evade that, somehow. Maybe he'll be asleep."

"Peter," said Kennard severely, "you show such disrespect for our police at times that I am moved to keep an eye on my watch."

"Come around to my diggings in time for that seven o'clock train for Chester," I replied. "We can get a Ford or something out of Chester. It won't be foggy to-night, and there's a moon, I think."

Kennard flung me a whimsical smile as he turned back to Betty Blakely and the ladies, where they stood beside the Tatlow car.

"All right, Peter, I'll be there," he nodded. "But there are any amount of things I'd rather do."

CHAPTER VI.

MORE MYSTERIES.

ALL the way Kennard and I went from Chester to the Thurman house in the Ford—which Kennard drove—the young doctor kept asking me what I expected to find, and reminding me that if the murderer is said to return to the scene of his crime, then so were we returning.

I merely grinned in the darkness, and now and then spoke warmly to the Ford.

A half mile below the Thurman place we left the car and approached the house on foot. It appeared ominously quiet and dark in its grove of trees, and to-night not even the dog barked.

"I hope," said Kennard sarcastically, "you'll have a satisfactory explanation to give the police when they catch you by the leg and haul you out of the parlor window."

"I have no intention of getting in the parlor window," I replied with dignity. I began to be sorry I had brought Kennard.

When near the house, a step on the

gravel of a near-by path startled us into immobility.

"The law!" whispered Kennard, who appeared to regard the whole adventure as a joke.

I made off as silently as possible through the trees in the direction of the sound, Kennard perforce following me, and at the edge of the grounds, near the road, a dark figure rounded a pillar and disappeared. I began to run, as I once ran at Yale, and Tom came along, a close second.

The dark figure was quite visible now on the side of the road, among the shadows, and it was obviously running also.

But not as we ran, and presently I reached out a hand and caught the figure by the shoulder.

"Howly Moses!" wailed an unmistakable Irish voice. "Have mercy on me! Don't ye touch me, ye murderin' thafe!"

I dropped back almost upon Kennard, who was bent over, laughing like an idiot.

"Suffering cats!" I gasped, for our quarry was none other than the Thurman cook, red-faced Mrs. Harriet O'Toole.

"We—we won't hurt you, Mrs. O'Toole," said Kennard, when he could speak. "We just came down to look the Thurman place over, and we saw some one running, and naturally we followed."

"Look it over, is it?" grunted Mrs. O'Toole. "Shure, ye're welcome. If iver there was a place of banshees and haunts, 'tis that wan, faith! And runnin', was I? Shure, 'tis flyin' I'd been if I knew how. Ye've scart me half to death, the two av ye. I come here after the inquest, Mr. Samson said I might, and got Tillie's clothes and me own, and shure, wan av thim detectives walked wid me ivery inch av the way I wint, which was plain ondacent av him, pryin' into two women's bags, which I was tryin' me best to pack! They've got no manners, the lot av thim. Shure, ye'll have company if ye go up there to-night. Iverywhere ye move ye run into wan av thim, snoopin' around."

"Mrs. O'Toole," I asked, disregarding Kennard's convulsions, "have you told us all you can about Lamont and the Luttrell affair?"

"Shure and I have," said Mrs. O'Toole indignantly. "There is nothin' I can be tellin' ye more, except maybe wan thing I didn't know meself this mornin'."

"And what was that?" I asked eagerly.

"The murderer's a thafe as well," was the astonishing reply. "It's me that wishes I had me hands on him this minute!"

"A thief!" repeated Kennard. "What do you mean?"

"Shure, me best bonnet and me best shawl is both gone intoirely," said Mrs. O'Toole indignantly. "Robbin' a poor sowl loike me and l'avin' all Mrs. Thurman's foine things alone!"

I was amazed. "Are you sure they're gone?" I asked her.

"Would ye be makin' a mistake, do ye think, if they was all ye had on earth?" asked Mrs. O'Toole angrily. "They was there on the hook in me room, and they ain't. That's all av it."

"Well, by Jove!" I said, staring blankly at the Irishwoman, as she and her bundles started on down the road.

"That Samson man and the West man, too"—her voice came back to us—"knows where to find me if they want me."

There was a wind now, and it whistled eerily through the treetops. We experienced a desire to keep together.

Kennard laid his hand on my arm.

"I say, Peter, we are rather fools to go up there." He nodded toward the house. "As our friend, Mrs.

O'Toole says, we'd go bumping into a cop every time we turned around. Stop and think a moment. If the lady of the slipper did not come or go in a car, she must have come from some house very near, or possibly has sought shelter there from the fog. You see, she hung around until Betty and I shut the kitchen door, then she got her slippers and went. Of course——"

"Yes, of course, her evening clothes would lead one to suppose she came in a car," I mused, "if the rest of her matched the slippers. Left it down the road a piece, I fancy. Anyhow, the chap who took Tatlow's didn't know where it was. I get your point. Still, West or that smart Samson chap has canvassed the neighborhood by this time. And nobody was produced at the inquest."

"Well, they've only had a few days. West said Mrs. Luttrell had five hundred dollars in a bag in her bosom. Too bad to bury her from the undertaker's like that. Nobody knows anything about her, it seems."

"No, she's been gone from Wedgely since late July," I replied. "Everybody thought she sold her house and left on account of the talk about Carstairs and her. He went up there a lot, you know."

"And what," asked Kennard, "do you suppose anybody wanted with Mrs. O'Toole's shawl and bonnet? Here we have one dainty lady in evening clothes, another in a smart cloth gown and fur cloak."

"By Jove!" I cried suddenly. "Molly said the woman who came into her room that night had on a dark cloak, but she heard silk under it. Maybe she——"

"Maybe nothing!" snapped Kennard. "I declare, Peter, you'll have me seeing ghosts and hearing banshees for the rest of my life. And nerves are not permitted in my business. Let me see, didn't we pass a house down the road a bit?"

"We did," I replied shortly, and cranked the car.

"We'll try it first, and then go the other way and try that one, though that will probably be the Brants' place."

The "house down the road a bit" told us nothing, as its windows were dark and its doors fastened. It bore the unmistakable appearance of being unoccupied, and after a moment we went back down the little path and stood by the gate and looked up at the dark, staring windows. The building was no more than a cottage, and there was surely nothing strange about its being untenanted, and yet I left it with an odd reluctance.

"I don't know why I hate to come away from here," I told Kennard, as I climbed back into the car, "but I do. It seems as if something about that cottage is——"

"It's about the most dismal thing I've seen in many a day," cut in Kennard disgustedly. "But you're right. It looks as if it might cough up a murderer at any minute."

"Well," I said, with a last lingering look, "on to the next, Tommy."

"The next" proved to be a country house of no mean dimensions, and we realized, as we reached the lodge where a cheery light burned, that this was the Brant place, where Kennard had telephoned that never-to-be-forten morning.

"Before we ask anything at the house," said Kennard, "suppose we see who is in the lodge and find out what they know. I guess the Brant people are pumped dry."

The gardener came to the door when we knocked.

"We turned in here, thinking it was the Thurman place," I told him. "How far are we from it?"

"It's the next on your right," said the gardener. "From bein' a quiet-

enough house, that there place has sure waked up lately. Some sad, wasn't it, findin' that little lady?"

"It was, very," said Kennard quietly.

"You're the second person as has asked me the way there," the gardener told me uneasily. "Mary, that's my wife, says I had ought to have told about this before. But when that West man, the detective, was quizzin' me, I was too scart to talk."

"We are not connected with the police," I said. "You may tell us and not fear any trouble."

"Oh, it ain't much," said the gardener, "but I guess I'd ought to have told it afore. The night that thing happened up to Thurman's, a lady come to this door where you are now and asked me the way to the Thurman place. It was so foggy I could hardly see her, and she stood off on the step there. After I told her, I think I heard a car on the road, but I ain't sure."

"What did the lady look like?" I asked eagerly.

"I couldn't see what she looked like. She was short, and wrapped in a big coat, and she had a sweet voice."

"What time was this?" put in Kennard.

"Well, it was after supper. I guess maybe about seven o'clock; it wasn't no later."

Seven o'clock! We looked at each other.

"Is that all you know?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. I'm ready to tell it if they want me to. I been wonderin' ever since if she was the one they killed."

"Know who lives in that empty cottage next the Thurman place?" I asked, as we turned to go.

"Empty cottage, sir?"

"Yes."

"No, sir. I only know one cottage there, and Miss Sally Oldboy lives there; has lived there for many years, I guess."

"Well, she doesn't now," said Kennard, "for it's closed, and no one answered our knocks, and we raised quite a racket."

"Well, sir, if that cottage is empty and Miss Sally gone out of it, which she ain't for an hour, long's I can remember, then she's gone since the murder up at Thurman's. Because that very afternoon I stopped and left her some apples. I used to buy her things when I went past into Chester to get something for the Brants."

We grew tense with interest.

"Was she the same as usual then, didn't say a word about going away—or anything?" asked Kennard.

I began to think there was certainly a great fascination in this detective business.

"No, sir. She just brought out a basin for the apples and thanked me, that was all. She never went away or had any company, as I ever heard of. That's all I know about her. I hope nothing's happened her."

We left the voluble gardener then and climbed back into the car.

I met Kennard's shining eyes.

"Well," I asked, "are you coming with me this time?"

"You bet!" said Kennard warmly. "We'll break into Sally Oldboy's house together, Peter. If we find a hundred bodies, I'm in this thing now to its finish—or mine."

CHAPTER VII.

A SCRAP OF PAPER.

MISS SALLY OLDBOY'S cottage, when Kennard and I returned to it, presented the same dark and deserted appearance, and Tom looked at his watch as we approached. It was almost ten o'clock.

"Let's try the back windows," I suggested, as we walked around the little brick path. "I haven't an idea what ails me about this little old house, but

I'm convinced it has something to do with the Luttrell affair."

"Pretty fierce if we run across Miss Sally's remains somewhere," said Kennard. "Rather a murderous neighborhood, I should say. I'd just as soon live somewhere else."

We tried windows in the most finished burglarious style, and presently, with the aid of a knife from Kennard's pocket, I lifted a window near the back of the house, put one foot in, pulled the other after it, and plunged forward into darkness.

By the time Kennard followed, I had somehow found a chain that hung from an electric lamp in the center of the apartment, and had lighted a cozy little dining room with the table set.

That table took up our entire attention for about five minutes, for it contained the remains of a supper some days old, two napkins flung down as though in great haste, and two chairs were pushed slightly back from its edge.

"Queer, eh, Tom?" I asked. "That bread and ham and these cups of coffee and plates of cheese have been here some time. As long ago as——"

"Yes," interjected Tom. "As long as the night of the murder at Thurman's."

"Gee whiz!" I breathed. "Well, come along—let's look over the place. Maybe we'll find Sally somewhere."

But we didn't. The cottage contained four rooms, besides the tiny kitchen, and all were empty and in perfect order, save the one we had first entered. We finally returned to it, more mystified than ever.

"Somehow, Tom, though I'm no six-eyed sleuth," I said, "I simply can't get it out of my head that the trail of the Luttrell murderer touches here. Don't you feel it? And yet——"

"Yes," said Kennard, "I think we're warm, Peter."

"We'll have to hustle to get that eleven o'clock train out of Chester," I mused, looking about the little room.

"What's this?" asked Kennard quietly, and lifted a scrap of paper from under a saucer.

On the paper was written in a shaky, thin hand:

Calthorpe. New York.

"Well," said Tom, with a long breath, "here is a clew you can run down, Peter. Find out what is in Calthorpe. By the way, I never heard of the place. Did you?"

"Never," I replied, feeling, however, oddly elated. "Can you come with me to-morrow?"

"No. Have two operations, more's the pity."

I paused, with one leg out of the window of Miss Sally Oldboy's dining room.

"Then I go alone," I declared dramatically. "I've been all these years looking for my proper vocation, and now I believe I've found it."

"Rats!" said Kennard, as he followed me back to the car. "You're hunting material for the *Evening News*, and you know it. However, I dare say I shall remove an eye to-morrow instead of an appendix, as a result of this night's work."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

I MADE three changes to reach Calthorpe, after I finally located it, and it took me four hours. Consequently I felt rather ruffled when I at last descended from the jerky two-car local at a small village station, much in need of paint. I could not get out of Calthorpe for three hours, I learned at the ticket window, and it looked mightily as though I could see the whole place in three minutes.

It was rather ridiculous, I thought, as I stood on the prosaic little plat-

form in the winter sunshine, and looked about at the narrow roads that led here and there between fields and farms, to associate Calthorpe in any way with the murder of Doris Luttrell, the little society widow, in the handsome grounds of the Thurman home, so far distant.

I had no real reason for thinking that the Oldboy cottage had any connection with the Thurmans or Mrs. Luttrell; yet, even as I told myself so, there remained the tantalizing desire to go on.

I turned back to the ticket window.

The young man behind it was long, lank, and sandy haired, and he regarded me with annoyance, having disposed of me once, and having just settled himself for a nap.

"Old top," I said affably, "do you happen to know of anything on earth around Calthorpe, house, person, dog, or visitor, named Lamont?"

"Nope," said the sandy-haired one, evidently resenting my familiarity.

"Be sure of that, young man," I said, with a frown. "This is more serious than you guess."

"Never heard the name!" snapped the youth.

"Anybody strange get off at your station here within the last ten days? Think, now!"

"Nope," said the youth again, and evidently considered the conversation closed.

"You're going to get yourself all mixed up in something, one of these days, for talking so much," I told him severely. "Do you know a Miss Sally Oldboy, then, if you don't know any one by the name of Lamont?"

"Nope," said the boy, with a flicker of his lashes that convinced me he lied.

I took a long look at him, gave him up, and strolled away villageward.

The Shade Hotel looked as though it might yield me a dinner that would stay the pangs in my vitals. It was not attractive, but proved rich in food and information when I reached it.

I was the only diner, and my questions to the pretty little waitress who seemed glad to talk to some one told me that Miss Sally Oldboy had lately returned to the Oldboy house on Juniper Street, and everybody was wondering why, as it had been closed for years.

When I learned this, I must confess that I felt slightly conceited. This was my first attempt along the detecting line, and I was certainly doing well.

The little waitress knew nothing about Miss Sally, save that no one in Calthorpe knew when or how she had come, or why.

The Oldboy house had gone to rack and ruin, but now Miss Sally was living in it alone, and would not see any one who called. "It was very strange, wasn't it?"

I agreed that it was, very.

So, a short time later, following the pretty waitress' directions, I sauntered past the Oldboy house, and from across the street stood in the shadow of the town hall and looked it over as I lighted my cigar.

It was surely a tumbled-down-looking place, and noting the shutters that hung from one hinge, the steps that gaped here and there, and the general air of decay about the place, I remembered the trim little cottage outside Chester which Miss Oldboy had vacated so suddenly and strangely.

"Looks bad, Sally, old girl—looks bad," I told myself. "You know a lot that I'm going to know before night."

I crossed the muddy street boldly and knocked at the Oldboy front door, an imperative knock that meant business and sent echoes through what sounded like an empty house.

I continued to knock for five or ten minutes, and then gave it up. Miss Sally evidently did not encourage callers.

When I crossed the street to the barber shop, I had entirely forgotten Lamont, whom I had had a sneaking notion I might find down here. All my interest seemed centered in the queer behavior of this queer old maid.

But the barber knew nothing—not why or how or when Miss Sally Oldboy had come back to the home of her ancestors.

No one saw her often, only when she came to the store with her basket, and, as far as he knew, she had no callers.

I became quite chummy with that barber; so chummy, indeed, that I came back after the hotel supper and sat in his front window and smoked and listened to village gossip that bored me to death.

I had decided to remain in Calthorpe until the six a. m. train. I had a desire to see what Miss Sally did o' evenings.

Not a light, however, appeared in the Oldboy house, and I was just beginning to think all Calthorpe had deceived me or Miss Sally had vanished again, when a car stopped at the dilapidated house across the street.

I rose, got leisurely into my coat, said a sleepy good night to the barber, let myself out into the cold December night, and darted across the street.

Whoever had come in the car—it was a handsome Pierce-Arrow, and I only knew one like it—had been let into the Oldboy house very quickly, for it bore the same dark and deserted appearance when I reached the shadows beside its decayed stoop.

The car at the curb, its engine still going, and whose license number I took, somehow set my pulses racing. I knew one car just like it.

I spent some little time out in the cold staring at the dark windows of the Oldboy house, and wondering what I should do next, but finally the door opened, and a man slipped out.

I heard a muffled "Good night," and, as the man sprang down the steps and into the car, I fell back weakly against the wall.

I had been right about the car, for the man was Halstead Carstairs!

CHAPTER IX.

MISS OLDBOY'S STORY.

NOW," I told myself, when I had recovered somewhat from the shock, "now, Miss Sally Oldboy, I shall get into your house, whether you wish it or not. It is high time somebody had a chat with you."

And so, feeling like a villain in a play, I knocked once again at the Oldboys' front door.

There was an absolute silence within.

The second time I knocked, I fancied I heard a faint rustle in the hall, and, putting my mouth to the keyhole, I whispered, very brilliantly, I thought at the time: "Let me in. It is Lamont."

After a moment of evident hesitancy, the door opened, and admitted me to a perfectly dark hall. I entered, but stood aside a moment, then the door closed, and I moved toward it with hands outstretched in the darkness. They touched a wall, a chair, then an arm, and I gripped it gently, for it was a woman's.

"Why didn't you knock as you said you would?" asked a fretful voice. "I declare, Lamont, you'll be the death of me yet!"

I thought that highly probable, if my ideas of Lamont were correct.

Then Miss Sally struck a match, lighted a lamp, and we looked at each other for the first time.

What I saw was a frail little lady in the late sixties, a small dark face, a pair of keen eyes, snow-white hair piled high, and a slightly stooped figure in a black serge dress.

Obviously, a woman of refinement,

who had seen better days. Not at all the type to open her door at night at the summons of a butler, and that butler a possible murderer!

There was surely something strange here.

She retreated from me in horror.

"You—it is not Lamont!" she gasped.

"No," I said, "it is not. But it is a friend, Miss Oldboy, and you need not be frightened. I am Peter Drayne, one of the automobile party who stopped in the fog at the Thurman house the night Mrs. Luttrell was murdered."

If I had announced that I was Jack the Ripper, and after her scalp, Miss Sally could not have looked more panic-stricken.

"Why—I—what do you want of me?" she faltered, and I noted that she did not deny knowledge of the Luttrell case.

"Cannot we sit down somewhere?" I asked. "I only want to ask you a few questions. Seeing Mr. Carstairs just come out of here, I made bold to knock. You know, I suppose, that he is suspected of being implicated in the murder of Mrs. Luttrell?"

I put it mildly, for in my heart I somehow believed that Carstairs had killed her.

Miss Sally did not reply to this, but led the way to a little back sitting room, where she placed the lamp on a table beside the stove. There was a couch in the corner, and I suspected that she slept there.

I settled myself comfortably upon it, and, starting at the beginning, told Miss Oldboy how and why Kennard and myself had broken into her cottage, and what we had found there.

"Tell me, now, Miss Oldboy, all you know about this deplorable case, won't you?" I asked. "For if you don't, I'm afraid you'll find yourself in the dickens of a mess."

Oh, I'd have made a fine detective! When I look back upon that interview——

Miss Sally clasped and unclasped her wrinkled hands.

"What I can tell you won't help," she said nervously. "Of course, it was silly of me to run away. I've seen that since. But how could I guess that anybody would connect me with that awful thing at the Thurman place?"

"Why did you run away?" I asked.

"Because Lamont asked me to," replied Miss Sally simply. "He said I would get in trouble if I didn't. I see now the only thing to do was to have stayed."

"Miss Oldboy," I said, and fastened my eyes on her pale face, *"who killed Doris Luttrell?"*

Miss Sally lifted her eyes with an indignant flash.

"I haven't an idea, Mr. Drayne," she replied. "I never saw Mrs. Luttrell, and never heard of her before this."

"Tell me all of it, won't you, Miss Oldboy?" I asked. "All that you know of this affair—or all that you know of Lamont."

Miss Sally sank back in her chair and drew a long breath.

I watched her white hands move palely on her black dress.

"I don't mind telling you all I know," she said quietly. "I have nothing to be afraid of. The night Mrs. Luttrell was killed up at Thurman's, I cooked my supper as I did every night. It was awfully foggy, I noticed, when I went out to the refrigerator on the back porch. I'd grown to know Lamont, the Thurmans' man, right well; he was forever bringing me good things from Mrs. Thurman, and she used to run in to see me now and then.

"I did a lot of crocheting for her. Lamont used to carry coal for me, and several times he mowed my lawn, which was real good of him, because he never

did anything like that at the Thurmans. Well, about eight o'clock Lamont came to my door and I let him in. He looked scared to death, and said for me to give him something to eat; that he was running away from the Thurman house. There was a lady out in the garden, dead, and he had fallen over her when he went to feed the dog. He was all alone at the Thurmans', I knew, for they had gone to New York for Thanksgiving, and he said there would be no one to suspect but him.

"He said he had never seen the lady before. I didn't know what to do. But I asked him to eat some supper with me, and while he did he answered all my questions. Then all of a sudden we heard a car out on the road above, near the Thurman gates. Its Klaxon was going and making an awful racket, but when we went out we couldn't see to the end of the path.

"'What does that mean?' asked Lamont, and I told him to sneak along in the fog and find out—perhaps the family had come home. Well, he went, and I waited an age before he came back, and when he did he was in the car—the car you had.

"He had gone to the garage and gotten it, he told me. He said they were a lot of people who had got lost in the fog, and had put in to the Thurman place for the night.

"He told me I had better come with him or they would find out he had been to see me, and would come and question me. He told me to come here for a while; he knew about my old home, and he reminded me, when I couldn't see the sense of my going with him, of how good he had always been to me. 'You need only stay until this blows over,' he told me, and if I hadn't known Lamont so well I would have thought he had done it. As it was, I didn't know what to think. I felt rather afraid of him as it was, but I wrote my address on a bit of paper for him—he must have forgotten it, after all, if you found it—and told him how to knock if he came here to see me, and when I left I even neglected to put away the supper. He was in such a hurry, and, to tell the truth, I was frightened."

"And why," I asked, "did Lamont leave Mr. Tatlow's car five miles down the road, and what became of you then?"

"I don't know anything about that," said Miss Sally calmly. "He put me on a train at Chester."

"And where does Mr. Carstairs come in?" I asked.

Young as I was at the game, I felt that there were holes in Miss Sally Oldboy's story big enough to drive a wagon through.

"I read in the papers how they suspected Mr. Carstairs, and I knew if you didn't get to Thurman's until near ten o'clock, and Lamont saw Mrs. Luttrell dead at eight o'clock, then Mr. Carstairs couldn't have done it. So I wrote him yesterday and told him what I knew, and asked him to come to see me. He came to-night. I have been looking for Lamont. I haven't been very true to him, but I don't quite trust him."

I could get nothing more out of Miss Sally. That was her story, and she stuck to it, and I left her finally, feeling rather discouraged with my effort at detecting.

I had not gone many steps along the cold, deserted village street before I came face to face with Levering West, lighting a cigar under a lamp-post. He met my amazed eyes with a smile.

"That was really very well told, the story you just listened to, Mr. Drayne," he said pleasantly, "but, unfortunately, there was a great deal left to be desired. I fear that Miss Sally Oldboy is as far off the track intentionally, as you are at present."

CHAPTER X.

SOME DISCLOSURES.

THERE was probably nowhere in the State at that moment a more astonished person than I was. From that time on to the end I meekly stood back for Levering West in the famous Luttrell case. I deceived myself no longer concerning my talents in the detecting line.

"Well, where in thunder did you come from?" I asked, and West grinned broadly.

"One of my keys most luckily fits Miss Oldboy's door," he replied genially. "I took the liberty of following you in. It was rather cold in the hall, but I am accustomed to being incommoded. I had a great desire to hear what she would have prepared to tell you, or any one else who might question her.

"They are a clever pair, she and Lamont. I noted that she carefully omitted all mention of the little lady of the slipper, the lady who so mysteriously mussed up Mrs. Thurman's boudoir, whose slippers Lamont came back to get—or she did—while one or the other of them waited in Miss Sally's cottage before all three made off in Tatlow's car. Told you nothing about that, did she?"

"Great Scott—*no!*" I exploded.

West smiled amusedly. "I hardly expected her to. Miss Sally is much smarter than you are giving her credit for. I have set two men to watching her, and I am not at all sure it is enough. But I don't want her to know she is watched, and I have hopes of catching Lamont through her, or—or bigger game."

I caught the detective's arm excitedly.

"Tell me, for Garfield's sake, all that you can!" I implored. "I run the sporting page, you know, and I swear that not one word of it will get into the *News*. This interest on my part is purely personal."

"Well, I had made inquiries in the neighborhood, and discovered that Miss Sally Oldboy was a great friend of the Thurmans," began West obligingly. "Lamont especially was known to go there now and then. We reached the place, I fancy, just after your visit, because we did not find the paper, but discovered the white satin slippers in Miss Sally's closet! I looked about a bit, now and then, and found out where the old lady's girlhood home was situated, and naturally, as Carstairs set out for Calthorpe to-day in his car—well, I came on down with two of my men. I've left them with Miss Sally now, and they will stick until this blamed case is over. One of Sammy's men is on Carstair's track continually, and he can have him. To tell the truth, I've no interest in Carstairs."

"But——" I began dazedly.

"No buts about it!" snapped West. "Carstairs had no more to do with Doris Luttrell's death than I had. The woman was dead at eight o'clock in the evening."

We walked on in silence for a moment, then—

"Do you realize, Drayne," asked Levering West, "that that clever old maid only told you one true thing in all that elaborate yarn she spun you?"

"I'll try to realize anything," I replied meekly. "What was it, if you please, sir?"

West grinned again.

"She told you she wrote Carstairs that she knew Doris Luttrell had been dead at eight o'clock that night, and that he could not have killed her. That was true. I saw the letter in Sammy's office. You see, we watch suspects pretty closely. But everything else she told you was a pack of lies. Miss Sally is one of the rare types of fearless spirits with stanch ideals of love and friendship that, more's the pity, are be-

coming fewer every day. Let me tell you, we detectives have the dickens of a time, when we do meet one. Give me a real dyed-in-the-wool villain every time. Miss Sally has shut her mouth, and she'll keep it shut."

"But who is she protecting, then, and what is all this stuff about the lady of the slippers?" I asked, as we neared the Shade Hotel, where West also had a room for the night.

The detective stopped short and regarded me with his queer one-sided smile.

"Think it over," he answered.

I had a brilliant moment then.

"Doris Luttrell knew the Thurmans were away, and went there for some reason to stay. Perhaps to meet——"

"Mrs. Luttrell had no intention of remaining at the Thurman house that night," said West quietly. "She had come on from her apartment in Boston to a Thanksgiving house party at the Moores' place, seven miles or so above Chester. I have found the boy who drove the station taxi from Lees, the place next Chester.

"He left Mrs. Luttrell at the Thurman gates in the fog, after she herself had got out at the Brants' lodge and asked the way. He was told to wait for her. He waited for a half hour, and then drove on into Chester, as the fog was growing so dense.

"Mrs. Luttrell's bag is in Sammy's office; the boy turned it over, but he was a new boy, and he didn't know the Thurman place. He got uneasy when he saw the affair in the papers, and was afraid Mrs. Luttrell was the woman he had driven, and was debating whether or not to come forward when I discovered him. As for the Moores—Mr. Moore himself paid me a visit yesterday and told me Mrs. Luttrell was a friend of his wife's, and that she had been expected at their house party. The Moores had hoped to avoid publicity, but, seeing that no one knew anything about the dead woman, they came forward. However, they can't help us much, as Mrs. Moore did not know Doris Luttrell very well.

"Now, Mr. Drayne, can you figure out the Sally Oldboy part of it?"

"No," I said forcibly, "I'm hanged if I can!"

Levering West made me an airy gesture as he entered the hotel.

"Every one to his own profession," he said, grinning at me wickedly. "I always devour your page, Mr. Drayne, in the *Evening News,* with avidity."

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN DETECTIVES DISAGREE.

INSPECTOR SAMSON leaned back in his office chair and regarded his friend and rival, Levering West, with an amused smile.

I repeat the interview, as West told it to me later.

"Very well, Levering, you run along your track and I'll pursue mine," he said briskly. "I tell you, Carstairs is our man. In a short time I'll prove it. I have the case in my hand; I can prove motive and opportunity. Your precious Doctor Kennard has obviously not told all he knows about that vitally important time when he and Carstairs were alone in the Thurman house before the Tatlow party came in."

Levering West rose and drew his heavy fur collar up about his square chin.

"You're away off, Sammy," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "but you can have Carstairs and welcome. He's no earthly use to me. You'll find out after a while that he can't even tell us much. He's so blamed afraid of his neck and his reputation that he's come near to endangering both."

Samson smiled again.

"I'm glad you're not intersted in Carstairs, Levering," he said, "and can

play in some other yard. Otherwise, we might clash."

"And you mean to say you attach no importance to Miss Sally Oldboy?" asked West.

"Oh, we'll question her later, of course. What she told Peter Drayne was just a lot of hash. You have your eye on her, all right. We know, anyway, what she wanted with Carstairs."

"But, then, that would clear Carstairs," said West. "If Doris Luttrell was dead at eight o'clock——"

"Rot! We have no proof that she was. We haven't even got Lamont. She was killed in the early part of the evening, both Kennard and Johnson agree as to that. The early part is any time before ten o'clock."

"Oh, well, I've given you enough hints, Sammy," grinned West. "I'm through. As a man, old chap, you're A number one in your class, but as a detective——"

Inspector Samson rose in simulated wrath.

"Get along out of here," he roared, "or I'll have you up for lese majesty!"

And West "got," with a backward grin that was maddening.

Late that afternoon Samson called him up at his apartments.

"I've arrested Carstairs," he said buoyantly. "Got my case all in shape, Levering. What do you say now?"

"Fine!" said West. "Go ahead. Have you arrested Kennard, too?"

"What for?"

"Well, he had as much chance of killing the poor girl as Carstairs had."

"Laugh, if you want to, I should worry," said Samson.

"We just unearthed a letter from Doris Luttrell to Carstairs, asking him not to hold such animosity toward her for something she could not help, and that she hoped she had not ruined his happiness. I believe they met by accident at the Thurman house, and that Carstairs killed her."

"And what did he do with the knife or the dagger he struck her with?" asked West, a bit sarcastically. "You know we haven't found it. Seems to me, that for quick action, Carstairs is something of a wonder."

"Got an awful case on Carstairs, haven't you?" asked Samson, with a sneer.

"No," said West, "but I've got an awful strong case against somebody else." Then he hung up.

The Tatlows were entertaining that ill-fated automobile party at dinner the night that Carstairs was arrested, and it was naturally the subject of the evening.

"Poor boy! Even if they let him go, this will cling to him forever," said Mrs. Tatlow tearfully.

"He never did it," said Betty Blakely quietly, and Kennard looked at her with a strange intentness.

"No," said Tatlow, "I don't believe he did."

"Holy smoke, no!" said Kennard. "The man didn't have time to do it! Those things surely have to be led up to somehow. Nobody stands up in cold blood and stabs a person through the heart, and a woman, at that. I saw Carstairs when he came back from the kitchens, and I can go on the stand and swear now that he certainly did not look like a man who had just killed a woman, nor could he have been as natural as he was if he had. He seemed strange, upset—a little nervous—but—why, the thing is preposterous—impossible!"

I had long since told them about my experience in Calthorpe, and so none of us was surprised when Levering West called me up a short time later.

"You're so interested in this case," he said to me over the wire, "I thought perhaps you would care to lunch with me to-morrow at the Shade Hotel, in

Calthorpe. Train you took before, you know."

"Then you haven't dropped the case?" I asked. "I thought since Samson had arrested poor Carstairs——"

"What Inspector Samson does is nothing to me," snapped the detective. "I told you I had no interest in Carstairs. Are you coming?"

"Am I?" I cried. "You bet! And I haven't any idea what for."

"I've just got within reaching distance of the solution—it may come at any moment, and to-morrow will hold the moment," said West. "I thought you'd like to be in at the finish. Of course, I can't promise the immediate finish."

"I'll be there," I said.

"This will be a lesson to Jamison, anyhow," Mrs. Tatlow was saying when I returned. "He'll probably know where he is going the next time. It is really Jamison who got poor Mr. Carstairs into this."

"Well—— Great Scott!" gasped her husband indignantly.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WOMAN.

IT was snowing when I got off the jerky two-car local at Calthorpe the next day.

I asked nothing this time, of the lanky, sandy-haired youth behind the ticket window, but made my way directly to the Shade Hotel.

Levering West was smoking in the bare front room, his feet on the rim of the stove. He was alone, and he greeted me like a brother.

"We have come to Calthorpe," he said, when my feet were beside his on the nickel rim, "to play the sneak and the spy. Are you prepared to do this in a good cause?"

"Yes," I replied unblushingly.

"This is the most elusive case I ever tackled," mused West. "I know, or I'm pretty sure I know, who killed that woman. I'm pretty sure whom Sally Oldboy is shielding. I'm pretty sure how it happened, and yet the hardest thing of all to overcome is standing in my way, blocking my path at every turn."

"And that is?" I asked.

"Love. Real, stanch, stick-to-you-until-the-end sort of love," replied West, staring at the tip of his cigar. "Love for a woman."

I stared.

"It has caused Doris Luttrell's death; it has made Lamont run away and hide; it has made Sally Oldboy leave her home and take to telling lies, which must go hard with the good soul. Some little woman, eh, who could do all that?"

"But—a woman!" stammered poor I, feeling that, indeed, I knew nothing about the Luttrell case. "I had no idea a woman had——"

"Oh, she didn't do it!" snapped West. "Man, use your wits. If my idea is not right, then no one did it."

"No one!" I gasped, doubting West's sanity.

"No one," he replied sternly. "If I could only make that old maid talk!"

I smoked a moment in silence, then asked: "Why have we come down here?"

"Because Miss Sally received a note yesterday from the city," replied West. "A note from a woman, and the good soul has been making all sorts of preparations for a visitor ever since. Possessing the lucky key that unlocks the Oldboy front door, I thought——" And West stopped and smiled his queer one-sided smile. "Of course, Miss Sally has no idea she is being watched."

"I see," I said slowly, and remembering the clear eyes, the erect little head, and the calm poise of the little old maid, I felt somewhat like a villain.

"Miss Sally ordered a quart of ice

cream from Gray, the baker," went on West, after a moment, "for supper tonight. I would stake all I have, Drayne, that the guest who is to help consume it could wear those white satin slippers very comfortably."

"Does Samson know about those slippers being in Miss Sally's cottage?" I asked.

"Heavens, no! There is a lot Sammy doesn't know," grinned West.

Late in the afternoon a spruce young man in a big woolly overcoat invaded the smoky privacy of the bare parlor, where we still sat before the fire.

"The lady has just arrived, sir," he told the detective quietly.

"Ah! In a car?"

"Taxi, sir. Came from Cresson, just below here."

"Did you see her?"

"No, sir. She wore a big fur coat and heavy veil. She held her muff to her face and went in very quickly. Miss Sally was looking for her."

"I'll be bound!" chuckled West. "Oh, that old maid! But I think this case is almost over, Drayne—almost. We have the lady of the slippers within our grasp. Clarke, Dick and you watch that house like cats until suppertime—don't let that woman get away! I'll take a hand then. Let me see—it is five-thirty now—at six we'll be over. We'll rustle something to eat around here if we can, for nobody knows what the night will bring forth."

"Very well, sir," said Clarke, and went quietly out.

I looked after West enviously. How could any man be so quiet at such a time? This beat fox hunting, lion hunting, any kind of wild sport I had ever dabbled in.

The streets of Calthorpe that winter night bore a cheery, homelike aspect that seemed to me most glaringly incongruous with the gruesome business which had brought us there. Snow was falling gently; it was the supper hour, and houses were lighted brightly, odors of frying and roasting things were in the air, now and then we caught a glimpse of a family gathered in the dining room.

Was it possible that here in Calthorpe there were at this moment two women who held guilty knowledge of that fearful foggy night at the Thurman house?

West must have read my thoughts.

"Too bad that such things exist," he said, "for it's such a blamed nice old world!"

The Oldboy house bore its usual blank, deserted appearance, but that did not daunt Levering West. He seemed to be in unusually high spirits. As we went cautiously through the shadows to the house, young Clarke darted around a corner. He was no longer quiet or composed.

"Mr. West—she's gone!" he cried excitedly. "From under our noses—like a shot—a minute ago!"

"What!" West stopped short.

"Yes, Dick was around at the back of the house, and I was there at the side, when—crack!—a big car whizzed up to the curb, and my lady flashes out the door and into it, and whiz—it was gone—like that, sir—before I could get more than halfway to it! Honest, I don't think it even stopped. You yourself, Mr. West, would have been at a loss."

Levering West, for once in his reserved life, gave way to rage.

"Don't blame yourself, Clarke," he said. "I am the fool To have let that woman escape me! I should have been in the house when she came. Even Sammy would have done that. But I was too sure—that's the one great stumbling block of any successful man—he forgets he can fail. And, great Scott, I did not give her credit for the brains she has! I could choke myself!"

He paced the snowy path a moment, frowning; then:

"What did the car look like, Clarke?"

Clarke grinned sheepishly.

"Well, I only saw it for a second, sir," he replied, "but I could swear it was Mr. Carstairs' or one like it. It was a Pierce-Arrow, I know—and it was the one, I'd lay any money, that was here the other night."

"What!" snapped West again. "You fool! Carstairs was arrested yesterday."

"I know that, sir—but his car wasn't," said Clarke doggedly.

"Well, it may have been the car, of course," mused West, after a moment. "I wouldn't be surprised at anything that turns up in this case. We can find that out. Clarke, are you sure those women didn't get on to the fact that they were watched?"

"Positive, sir. I think she—the lady—only took precautions."

"Probably. I've no doubt she would take poison if necessary. Well, we must start again, that's all. Keep up your watch on Miss Sally, Clarke, but don't let her know it."

And West turned back to the Shade Hotel, bitter chagrin, I knew, in his heart.

"Only to have heard what those two women said," he grumbled. "Dolt—ass—fool that I am! Wouldn't Sammy roll all over New York in a fit if he knew? Smart—*me! Rot!*"

At the entrance to the hotel I ventured a question:

"Miss Sally is not very true to Lamont, is she? See how she practically accused him, to me—at least she threw suspicion his way."

"Suspicion! She and Lamont had that all fixed, my boy. That's one of the beautiful parts of this case. The devotion of it—hers and Lamont's. By George, it's wonderful! See how he was willing to sacrifice himself if they were cornered!"

I mentally flung up my hands.

"Have you any objection to telling me," I asked meekly, "who this woman is, Mr. West?"

Levering West paused in the snow and regarded me in amazement.

"Why, I thought you had all that figured out by now!" he said. "Is it possible there still lives a man any more stupid than I am? You make me feel better, Mr. Drayne."

I laughed.

"And the woman—this wonderful woman?" I persisted.

"The woman," replied West resignedly—"and I don't expect you to betray any of my confidences in your confounded *Evening News*—the woman, Mr. Drayne, is Mrs. Edward Thurman, and you should have known it a week ago."

CHAPTER XIII.

CARSTAIRS' STATEMENT.

HALSTEAD CARSTAIRS kept his car, the Pierce-Arrow, in a garage near his apartments, and when Levering West entered it the next day, the car stood in its usual place. One man, a merry-eyed Irishman, was washing a roadster, and him the detective accosted.

"Mr. Carstairs' car was out yesterday, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, sor," replied the man calmly, and West got a jolt.

"And what time did it come in?"

"Oh, about eleven o'clock, sor."

"Ah! Do you object to telling me who took it out? I suppose you know Mr. Carstairs cannot use it at present."

"Shure, I knew he was in jail, poor fellow. Niver done it, he didn't. He was always the open-handed, kind-hearted gent to us all."

West took the hint, and with a grin flung the man a bill.

"Now tell me, please, who took Mr. Carstairs' car out, and why you let him have it."

"It was a tall man who come for it, sor, English spoken. He was foriver

droppin' his aitches, and I'm thinkin' he was somebody's butler."

West got another jolt. Had it been Lamont? He thought it highly probable.

"At what time was this?" he asked.

"About three o'clock, sor."

Three o'clock! From Wedgely to Calthorpe in three hours! Carstairs' car made a record run!

"Did the same man bring it back?"

"Yes, sor."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sor."

"And do you permit any one who wishes to, to take out Mr. Carstairs' car?"

"Faith, no, sor! But this wan had a note from Mr. Carstairs, sor, sayin' he wanted the car himself last night and to let the man have it."

"Where is the note?"

"Faith, I don't know, sor. I threw it away. But it was Mr. Carstairs' writin', sor, and it was just like the wans he used to write me when his Jap, the crazy little idjit, or wan of his friends, come after the car."

"Well, but didn't you know Mr. Carstairs couldn't possibly use the machine, as he was—er—in custody?"

"Yes, sor, but the man told me Mr. Carstairs was out again, on bail, or somethin'. It's glad I am, because he niver——"

"Bail has not been accepted on this murder charge," snapped West. "I am afraid, my man, you will answer to Mr. Carstairs for this, and I advise you not to let it happen again."

"Well, who are ye, begorra, to be talkin' so——" began the Irishman, hands on his hips, but West walked calmly out.

Now what, he wondered, had been the sense of using Carstairs' car to take Mrs. Thurman away from Sally Oldboy's? To implicate Carstairs further, perhaps. But what an asinine thing to do when Carstairs was in jail!

He could make nothing out of it, but as soon as possible he got Inspector Samson on the wire.

"Sammy, how's Carstairs coming on?" he asked, after a few preliminaries.

"Oh," said Samson cheerfully, "I let Carstairs off yesterday. That is, released him on the murder charge, but am holding him as a witness, of course. I'm by no means convinced about him yet. But I got to thinking it over, and —er—we've got Lamont."

"Lamont!" West nearly fell out of his chair.

"Yep. Caught him in Wedgely last night about midnight getting on a train for Chester. I'm going to follow your advice and look up this Oldboy and Lamont business. Lamont is mute as a clam yet. Jim only took him up on suspicion, but Mrs. O'Toole and Tillie both identified him this morning."

West hung up the receiver and sat staring fixedly across the office. Then he grinned.

"Come over in my yard, has he?" he asked himself. "Well, I'll have to hustle if I'm to beat Sammy to it. So that's what the game was—they knew Carstairs was free again, and they are trying to mix him up in this thing further if possible. I'll bet a hat, Carsairs never heard of that note. But you'll find, Sammy, old top, that there's a kick left in Levering yet."

"Now, Mr. Carstairs," said West, as he sat in Carstairs' comfortable apartments that afternoon, "since you deny having written the note to that azure-eyed Irishman with the itching palm, who valets your car, suppose you tell me your part in this exciting little tragedy? Don't you think it is pretty near time?"

"I'd a darn' sight rather tell you than that blithering ass who arrested me," gritted Carstairs.

West grinned boyishly. "Go ahead, then."

"If he arrests me without hearing this, I suppose he will hang me when he hears it," said Carstairs, with a sneer.

"Of course, you know how well I knew Mrs. Luttrell at one time, and I am sorry enough, since it has finished me with Miss Blakely, whom I have always cared a great deal for. But at any rate, Doris and I were not very good friends. I'd told her what she had done for me, calling here at my apartments while she lived in Wedgely, and telling women a lot of stuff there was no truth in.

"But I hadn't seen her for a long time; I only knew she lived in Boston—I had a letter from her from there. I suppose you've seen it. I thought the less I knew about her the more Betty —Miss Blakely—would—— But that doesn't matter.

"When I went downstairs that night at Thurman's and left Kennard in the boudoir, I told the truth about that thing flying past my head and landing in the sink. I chased out into the fog after whoever threw it, and I followed the sound of footsteps. I couldn't see a thing until I—well, I tripped over Mrs. Luttrell's body. It was just where we found it the next day, but it was warm. I had my hand on her face. The dog barked and I—well—I was so close when I got up that in spite of the dark and fog I knew it was Doris.

"I couldn't imagine what on earth she was doing there, but of course I didn't know, either, where we were. Well, I was sick for a moment. I saw the whole thing, the way they would suspect me, and I decided I would not say a word. I'd gotten back to the kitchen door when I heard a woman's voice near me in the fog; Kennard was right about that."

"'Are you there?' it asked. 'Oh, tell me, where are you?'

"It was the shrillest, most scared-to-death voice I ever heard in my life. I thought I would catch the woman if I could, so I answered her. 'Yes,' I said, 'I am here—by the door.'

"Kennard must have heard me reply, but he is a brick, he never mentioned it. He deserves—— Well, to go on: I heard a kind of gasp and a rustle, and then some one ran farther and farther away into that fearful fog —that held—— Heavens, man! I felt sick when I thought of it. I knew Doris had been murdered, because my hand was wet and I—I stopped at the sink to wash——"

West nodded. "Yes, I know that," he said quietly.

Carstairs stared. "You do? Well, I went in to Kennard then and met him coming out to the kitchen. He asked me if I had heard a woman's voice, and I said I hadn't. After that I just kept quiet."

West drew a long breath, looked Carstairs keenly in the eye a moment, and then nodded briskly.

"Thank you, Mr. Carstairs," he said, rising. "Tell that story as frankly on the witness stand and I don't think you will have much trouble, but you may congratulate yourself that you have come out of a rather bad mix-up pretty well. You see, I knew you hadn't killed Mrs. Luttrell for more reasons than I can name at just this moment, the first one being that the stiletto or knife she was killed with is nowhere on the place, and you would have had no time or opportunity to take it anywhere else."

Carstairs stared admiringly.

"I wondered why you had us men searched when you let us leave Thurman's," he said. "You chaps are a shrewd lot."

On the way out, Levering West curled his lip.

"The coward," he muttered. "Still, if he hadn't shut his mouth, Sammy

would have been bumping into me at every turn, and I wouldn't have got even as far as I am."

From the Savoy Hotel, West called up Inspector Samson on the long-distance telephone.

"Hi—Sammy!" he called, like a veritable schoolboy.

"I've just got Carstairs' story, and he didn't have any more to do with Doris Luttrell's death than the town clock. As a reward, Sammy, may I see Lamont?"

"Yes, hang you, whenever you want to," came back the growling reply; "if you can make him talk. We can't. Can Carstairs prove his story?"

"No," said West serenely. "But I can in a day or so. He was simply scared to death. And—Sammy!"

"What?" came an ungracious growl.

West chuckled.

"Since you're coming over in my yard to play, I'm going to have a nice game all planned when you get there!"

The slam of a returned receiver answered him, and he emerged from the booth still chuckling.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLANT.

THE interview Levering West held with Lamont late the following afternoon was most unsatisfactory.

Lamont refused to talk. He was worse than Miss Sally; he had no story prepared. He even refused to repeat hers. He simply would say nothing, even when West practically told him all he knew about the case, which was more than I knew at that time.

The detective regarded Lamont's stubborn silence a moment, knew it for the kind of silence that is broken only by weeks of grilling and persistence, sometimes not then—and left him abruptly.

There was only one thing left to do, or Samson would have the laugh on him the rest of his days. He was losing patience, anyhow.

So he went home and wrote a note to Mrs. Edward Thurman, then he called up the drug store in Calthorpe, and sent a message to Miss Sally Oldboy, and finally he telephoned me.

The young man Clarke met us at Chester the next night when we descended from the seven-thirty train.

"They're there, Mr. West," he told the detective. "Miss Sally and Dick; he's never left off shadowing her. Dick is out in the garden and the old lady is in the house, busy as a bee; got the lamps lighted and is setting out the eats she brought with her from Calthorpe. Dick is looking through a crack under a shade, but you bet she's got them all pulled down."

"All right, Clarke," said West crisply. "Here is where no automobile comes up with a crack and goes off with a whiz, and no lady escapes us this time. Did you fix that window?"

"Yes, sir, this afternoon. You can push her up without a sound."

I was excited and mystified. West turned to me with a grim smile as we got into the car Clarke had provided.

"It was good of you to come, Drayne, after the wild-goose chase I led you the other night," he said, "but I thought I owed you this. To-night, for sure, closes the much-talked-of Luttrell case and puts one over on Inspector Samson, or I'll quit the business."

I must confess I shivered slightly. The wind was cutting, but it was not entirely that that chilled me.

Levering West's manner spelled somebody's finish, and I knew by the grim silence of the two men that this was, indeed, no wild-goose chase. Of course, despite what Clarke had said, I had an idea that we were bound for the Thurman house, and when Clarke stopped the car a bit down the road and we walked to Miss Sally Oldboy's

cottage, I felt more and more bewildered.

There was snow on the ground, and it was a beautiful night. One of those still nights when a serene moon rides in the clear heavens, and the stark trees fling black shadows across white paths.

I felt rather sick, and wished myself heartily out of it all.

To-night's work was to put a fellow creature out of sight of this beautiful world, perhaps forever; for a moment I felt disgust for Levering West and his cold-blooded profession. Then I remembered the woman I had seen on the Thurman path in the early sunshine of that cold November morning—yes—the person who had done that had deserved to die. I braced up and followed West and Clarke across Miss Sally's little garden.

"Clarke," said West, still in that grim, brisk tone, "Mr. Drayne and I are going in. I intend to take no chances this time. You stay out here with Dick, and if you hear me whistle later, come in, both of you. If not, just stick around."

And very quietly, West walked to one of Miss Sally's little front windows, drew a flat object from his pocket, and lifted the window noiselessly.

A sound of frying came from the kitchen, a delicious smell of coffee was in the air. Miss Sally moved pots and pans about, and we could hear her feet trotting around as she prepared a meal.

After we climbed through the window, West flashed a light about the parlor and discovered it to be a fair-sized room which afforded only one place of concealment, a tall cabinet which stood across a corner.

It was a conveniently wide cabinet, and after ten minutes or so of noiseless movement, we got behind it and managed to draw it sufficiently far back into its former position to deceive its owner, should she come in.

We could see a bit of the dining room through a slit in the curtains that hung between it and the parlor, and when presently Miss Sally entered and set a plate of bread on the table, I caught West's arm.

"Great Scott!" I whispered. "She is setting three places!"

West nodded shortly, and I could have throttled him for the scarcity of his words.

Presently some one knocked on the front door, a peculiar knock, a tap, then two taps, then a tap and a rattle of the knob.

Miss Sally flew through the hall and flung open the door.

"My dear!" I heard her cry. "I came, you see, as you asked me to. What would I not do for you? What is wrong, Lelia? Are you going to permit me to speak? This silence is——"

"What do you mean, Miss Sally?" asked a high, sweet voice, which I remembered as Mrs. Thurman's. "You sent for me and I came."

"I sent for you!" repeated Miss Sally, as she led her guest to the dining room. "No, I would not have dared. When I got your telephone message I feared—I feared, perhaps—they had discovered——"

"Oh, Miss Sally, you frighten me! What can it mean? I did not telephone you!" cried Mrs. Thurman.

In the darkness I turned my head cautiously and looked at Levering West. The detective met my eyes with a grim smile.

CHAPTER XV.

A CONFESSION.

PEERING out of my corner of the cabinet I could see through the curtains Mrs. Thurman, where she sat at the dining-room table, her fur coat flung back, the soft white collar that fell away from her white throat, a glimpse of her pale, sweet profile; a

little hand came into view now and then as she toyed with the fur collar or clasped her throat nervously.

I noticed the flash of diamonds as the restless hand moved. This was the woman, then, for love of whom so much had been dared and sacrificed!

She was not so beautiful, I thought; and then—I caught the music of her voice, soft, low, tremulous, as she spoke to Miss Sally, and somehow a magic presence seemed, with this woman's entrance, to have filled the Oldboy cottage.

"Get it?" asked West in my ear. "A charm you can *feel,* Drayne. I don't wonder that——"

And then Mrs. Thurman spoke, and we were silent.

"It worries me terribly, Miss Sally," she was saying. "There is something wrong. I never sent for you; you never sent for me. They have arrested poor Lamont, but I would trust him to the grave—they will never make him speak. It is for Edward I fear—Edward and you."

"Lamont would never do the half I would do for you," said Miss Sally scornfully. "See how I have kept silent, when by one word—I tell you, Lelia, it has been killing me!"

"I know, I know. But—we have dared so much now, we've been so brave. If they should ever discover that it was Edward's stiletto that——"

"But, my dear," said Miss Sally's troubled voice, "I could tell them——"

West pinched my arm; I could see that his eyes were gleaming. As for me, I couldn't make head or tail of any of it.

"You must not tell them," said Mrs. Thurman sharply. "You know I could not bear it—we none of us could prove it. How can you, Miss Sally—at this late day? I must go. There is something wrong—those messages were sent by the police, I know."

"But your supper—Mr. Thurman's supper," faltered Miss Sally.

"I am sorry. I must go, Miss Sally. Don't you see I must not let Edward come here?"

But before the two women could reach the hall, West, to my amazement, pushed aside the cabinet and stood between the curtains that screened the dining room.

"No, Mrs. Thurman," he said very quietly, "you shall not go. Neither shall you warn your husband. You are a brave woman, and you've played the game mighty well. You have that rare gift of commanding love and service and sacrifice. Were I wearing a plumed hat I would sweep it at your feet." West bowed low before the slender, erect figure. "But," he continued, "the Luttrell mystery is solved. It is too late to warn your husband now."

I never forgot the way in which Mrs. Thurman's head went up, or the look in her wide eyes as they met Levering West's.

Despair and hopelessness was there, yes; but no fear.

"I do not know what you mean, Mr. West, or why you connect my husband or myself or Miss Sally with Mrs. Luttrell's death in my gardens," she said haughtily, and the brave, sweet voice only trembled a very little.

West looked at her in admiration and nodded slightly at me; a brisk little nod that said: "What did I tell you?"

While Mrs. Thurman spoke, Miss Sally had been edging toward the door, and now West put out a quick hand and stopped her.

"You will remain here, if you please, Miss Oldboy," he said sharply. "As I said, it is too late to warn Mr. Thurman. Even if he does not come tonight, we shall arrest him to-morrow for the murder of Doris Luttrell."

Mrs. Thurman's hand went again to

her slim throat, and again I caught the flash of jewels.

"You cannot do a thing like that without proof," she said clearly. "And you have none."

"Suppose we sit down and wait for Mr. Thurman," said West quietly; "he may have a great deal to say for himself."

But Mrs. Thurman stood erect beside the table. Her beautiful eyes roved about the little dining room in a trapped fashion that was infinitely pathetic. Miss Sally laid one thin arm over her shoulders.

"It will be all right, dearie," she said gently, and then I am sure that West got the shock of his career. I know that I did, for, turning quietly to him, Miss Sally Oldboy flung up her head proudly and looked squarely in his face with her old, keen eyes.

"If you arrest Mr. Thurman, you will be doing a wicked thing that you will have to undo," she said clearly, "for I, and I alone, killed Mrs. Luttrell."

CHAPTER XVI.

GATHERED THREADS.

BEFORE any of us could move or speak after this breath-taking announcement, the front door opened quietly, closed softly, and Edward Thurman entered the dining room.

Mrs. Thurman ran to him with a little broken cry.

"Oh, Edward, she has told—Miss Sally has told!" she gasped, and, as he put his arm about his wife, Thurman turned and looked at West and me.

"It is better so—I am glad," he said simply. "Mr. West, Miss Oldboy killed Mrs. Luttrell because she lifted a pistol to my wife's breast. She killed her with a stiletto which I carry in the head of a very old cane of mine, and these brave women have been keeping silent to protect me. I've had the devil's own time about it, and now I'm heartily glad it's out. No jury would convict Miss Sally when it knows the story."

West rubbed his lean hands together. "Suppose we hear all about it," he said quietly.

"Mrs. Luttrell had annoyed me for some time," began Mr. Thurman, in a low, rapid fashion, his hand on his wife's. "I met her in Boston, after a lapse of years. I had gone to Boston on a business trip without Mrs. Thurman. I met her at several affairs, and she called me up a number of times and endeavored to make engagements with me.

"I had known Doris Luttrell in days long past, when she was Doris Emlen, and we were both students at college. We had quite an affair at that time, but I had forgotten all about it years since; it astonished me to find that she had not. I told her in Boston that all this was long since dead as far as I was concerned, and that I was happily married.

"Doris was always an excitable nature, and we had quite a scene before I left Boston. She appeared to think that I would pay her to keep silent about that old foolish affair. After I came home she kept writing me at intervals, and twice Mrs. Thurman saw her letters. We talked the matter over together, but not very happily, and when finally Doris started to call me up on the long-distance telephone, I told her she must cease annoying me, or I would take means to make her.

"Very soon it began to make a difference in my wife's happiness and mine. I felt she did not trust me. At Thanksgiving time we sent the servants away, all but Lamont, and prepared to go to Mrs. Thurman's mother's for the holidays. Doris had written me that she was coming to the Moores' over Thanksgiving, and would I see her if she stopped over? She said she wished

to see me, and would never trouble me after that.

"Well, things had gone from bad to worse between my wife and myself, all on her account, and I was pretty bitter about it.

"So I wrote her myself, and told her to stop, that I wanted to settle this matter, once and for all. There was no reason why our lives should continue to cross. I let Lamont into the secret and told my wife I had to go up the State on a little business trip, but would join her the next day at her mother's. Mrs. Thurman did not trust me, and—she returned to our home unexpectedly and began to pack up her things preparatory to leaving me. Lamont was very much frightened when she appeared, and ran down to Miss Sally's to see what she could do with my wife. Miss Sally has been our dear friend ever since we lived here. While Lamont was gone, I arrived, having walked over from Chester in the increasing fog. I saw the machine at our gate, and fancied Doris was there, so hurried to the house.

"Perhaps Miss Sally can better tell the rest."

Miss Sally Oldboy looked up very quietly, yet there shone in her face a strange new peace, and I knew she was glad to be able to speak at last.

"I knew, of course, about the affair between Mrs. Luttrell and Mr. Thurman," she began very quietly, and Mrs. Thurman left her husband and went over and sat beside her, holding one thin hand.

"Lelia always told me everything; she has grown very dear to me, though I could nearly be her mother when it comes to years.

"I was getting supper that night, as I told Mr. Drayne, when Lamont came to me through the fog and said Lelia was home and packing up to leave Mr. Thurman. He told me, too, about Mr. Thurman's telling Mrs. Luttrell to stop there, and it seemed to me as though something terrible must happen. I told Lamont I would come over as soon as I got my supper set away. It was very late then—after seven; I always ate late; it made the evenings short.

"When I got to the Thurmans, I heard loud voices in the garden around back, and I went through the fog to the back door. It seems Mrs. Luttrell had lost her way in the fog, and that Lamont had come upon her there, and that Lelia, hearing voices and looking for Lamont, had gone out in her dressing gown and one little slipper, and found them. She always wore those slippers around the house, and always kicked one off because it hurt her foot. Mr. Thurman used to tease her about them.

"Well, it wasn't a moment before Mr. Thurman came, and then there was a terrible scene. I have never seen him so angry, and as for Mrs. Luttrell—when he was telling her what he thought of her, and what he had sent for her for, and how much he loved his wife, I thought she would fly at him. Mrs. Thurman just stood there in her pretty, loose gown, with her head held high—but if looks could have killed—we were all so close there in the fog—I am sure Mrs. Luttrell would have killed her long before she tried to.

"It was after she had asked if she was not to be invited into the house to wait for the fog to lift, and Mr. Thurman had replied that she should never enter any house of his, that she flung back her head with a little rasping laugh and aimed that revolver at Lelia. She was so close that I knew she would kill her instantly, and I had just been standing there watching her. Mr. Thurman has a big mahogany cane, which he always carries. It has a stiletto in it, and while he had been talking with Mrs. Luttrell, he had taken that stiletto out of the cane and slipped

it back a dozen times. I got fascinated watching him.

"Well, Lamont jumped when I did, but I was nearer, and I snatched that stiletto and struck at Mrs. Luttrell with it. The revolver went off as it fell, but she fell, too."

Miss Sally grew very pale as she reached this part of her story, but Mrs. Thurman lifted her wrinkled hand to her soft cheek encouragingly, and, after a moment, she went on:

"She was dead. We none of us knew exactly how it all happened. I didn't care. I only knew she would have killed Lelia.

"We saw instantly how it would look, but we had a time with Mr. Thurman, making him see that it must be kept quiet. My desire was, of course, to tell all I knew instantly. I had but saved a life, and had not meant to take another. But Lelia said it was her stiletto I had struck her with, and they would never believe my story. There was motive and everything. We knew there was no use moving Mrs. Luttrell, as the cabman would know where he had left her, but Lamont cut the telephone wires to make it seem as mysterious as possible.

"I had just put the revolver in my dress when we heard an automobile on the road outside, and people talking. Lelia insisted that we go to my cottage, and that Lamont stay and see who these people were, and what they wanted. She slipped upstairs and got Mrs. O'Toole's shawl and bonnet, and we went out into the fog. She had no time to dress, and even forgot that she wore only the one white slipper. Mrs. Thurman said that if she took the cook's things it might add to the mystery, and, anyhow, she could wear them on top of some of mine when she went back to her mother's. It had been decided to tell her mother. The two men, Mr. Carstairs and Doctor Kennard, came while we were still in the garden, and we all waited to see what they wanted. We were not afraid of discovery in that dense fog, and Mr. Thurman kept begging us to tell the truth to the police at once.

"It was foolish of Lamont to throw that thing at Mr. Carstairs, but he was making in a bee line for where Mrs. Luttrell lay, and Lamont had been listening by the kitchen door. He said he thought it would look as though there were burglars about.

"Mr. Carstairs, as it happened, chased Lamont and stumbled right over Mrs. Luttrell. We know this—we were close to him.

"Mrs. Thurman was not with us then; we knew afterward she was searching for the cane, the stiletto Lamont had in his pocket, and I clung to the revolver that had been aimed at Lelia. I have it still in Calthorpe. Lelia knew nothing about Mr. Carstairs, and I heard her call, 'Where are you?' or something like that, and I knew she was hysterical. When he answered her, she rushed toward us in a panic.

"The car had been taken into Chester some days before to be done over, and then Lamont began to insist that we take theirs if it was put into the garage, and get away in it. Mr. Thurman was very hard to manage, and I would rather have stayed and told it all—but Lelia was frantic. And Lamont was as bad. The Thurmans had a bite to eat at my cottage after we got the car, then Lamont took Mr. Thurman to Lees, the station below. Lelia would not go with him; she said she would go by another way in Mrs. O'Toole's things. She said they might be suspected anyhow, and it would make it harder to connect her with it. She begged me to go to my old home in Calthorpe for a time, as they would be sure to come and question me. I finally consented, but it was against my wish and better judgment. I wrote my ad-

dress on a slip of paper for Lamont, and we made up the story I told Mr. Drayne, if any one should question me in Calthorpe. Lamont was more than willing to have suspicion thrown on him, for he worships Mrs. Thurman. As it happened, in the excitement Lamont left that slip of paper on the table."

West drew a long breath. He regarded that upright old maid with a sort of amused admiration.

"Will you tell me, please, Mrs. Thurman, why you went back to your home after Lamont took your husband away in Mr. Tatlow's car?" he asked then.

"I went back," said Mrs. Thurman steadily, "to get my husband's cane."

"Yes?" questioned West. "Will you tell us about it, please?"

Mrs. Thurman met the detective's eyes with her own beautiful steady ones. Her hand still held Miss Sally's. When she spoke, her voice was low.

"I put up the kitchen window, as Tillie used to do, with a knife, when she was locked out, only I used the big pin I wear in my hair. Then I unlocked the kitchen door, so that I could get out quickly. I knew that if ever they found the cane, they would never believe our story if we had to tell it. I remembered that Edward had gone to our room after Miss Sally came, and I went there to look for the cane. I was determined to have it. Of course, I know now that our story can be proven; there are many things like finger prints and exact positions when it all happened, and so on—that we can find to help us—but that night I did not think of anything. I scarcely knew what I was doing, it all seems a blur. Miss Sheerness and Miss Blakely had our room, and Miss Sheerness saw me and screamed. I lost my other slipper in the kitchen when you"—she glanced at me—"almost caught me, but I found the cane in the garden somehow in that awful fog.

"When Doctor Kennard and Miss Blakely set my slippers out on the step, I went and got them, and found my way somehow to Miss Sally's. Lamont came back for us then and took us to Blackmore, seven miles above here, where I took a train for the city.

"I left the slippers in Miss Sally's closet, for none of us thought her cottage would be searched, and I put on a dress of hers under my cook's shawl. Miss Sally took a train from Blackmore for Calthorpe an hour after mine left, and Lamont walked from where he ran the automobile into a ditch to a trolley line, and rode into Wedgely, where he got a noon train for the city."

"And the stiletto—the cane?" asked West.

"Lamont buried them near where he left the car—he knows the exact spot." West leaned back and thrust his hands in his pockets. "Can yo ubeat it?" he asked me, and I shook my head.

"It worried me so," spoke up Miss Sally again, "that I wrote to Mr. Carstairs to come to see me. I knew I had killed Mrs. Luttrell"—she shuddered as she spoke—"and that they suspected him. I could not see him die for my crime. It was disloyal to the Thurmans and Lamont, but I had to do it."

"And why," West spoke gently to Mrs. Thurman, "did Lamont use Carstairs' car to take you from Miss Sally's house in Calthorpe?"

"I had to see Miss Sally," replied Mrs. Thurman, "I had not heard from her, and I wrote that I was coming to see her. She did not dare write me or telephone, especially after Mr. Carstairs and Mr. Drayne came, and Lamont walked past my mother's house once a week, by previous arrangement, the faithful soul—to see if I needed him. We fixed the exact minute he was to come for me in a car, at Miss Sally's. Lamont knew they suspected Mr. Carstairs, and that he had been freed on that charge that afternoon. So he

trumped up an excuse and went to see the Japanese valet and grew quite friendly with him. Finally, he told me, he got a look at Mr. Carstairs' writing. He came away with one of his notes and copied it—the writing—the best he could. Lamont is sometimes very clever, but he told me the valet was a fool.

"The man at the garage thought it was all right, and the rest was easy. It was Lamont's idea to further entangle Mr. Carstairs, and he knew nothing about his call on Miss Sally. I was sorry he had done all that, was very angry in fact."

As Mrs. Thurman finished, the door into the hall opened quietly, and Inspector Samson walked in.

West merely looked at him with his provoking grin. I fancy he knew he had followed Mr. Thurman from New York, and was not surprised that he had listened to the story of the Luttrell case. Those detectives seemed to know just what the other chap is up to all the time.

"Well, Levering," he said, with a reluctant smile, "I guess you have beaten me to it this time, but there will be a next, you know."

It was to West, however, that Mr. Thurman anxiously turned.

"Will we have any great difficulty, do you think, in proving our case?" he asked. "I wouldn't have this dear Miss Sally——"

West rose slowly and got into his overcoat.

"I don't think so, do you, Sammy?" he asked provokingly. "Since I already have the revolver, and myself uprooted the cane and stiletto from the vicinity of the ditch where Lamont left Tatlow's car; since I knew all about the story from Mrs. Thurman's mother before ever Mrs. Thurman spoke, and have proved the truth, before I heard it, of the passengers taken on that night at Blackmore, at Lees, and left off at Calthorpe; since I have traced Lamont's movements, and can prove many other items when I get at it. Mrs. Luttrell's fingers are stamped plainly on the revolver, Sammy, and on the note she wrote Carstairs, and which you have tucked away in your office. The cane and stiletto have to be looked at yet. Clarke hasn't had a chance to get around to them. In the face of all this, Sammy, do you suppose we will have any trouble in bringing in a verdict of justifiable homicide and of acquitting Miss Sally?"

I watched the slow radiance grow on the faces of the little old maid and Mrs. Thurman, who still held her hands; saw the glad relief which squared Mr. Thurman's shoulders, and noted the slow, chagrined smile which crept about the inspector's mouth.

"I hardly think so, Levering," he said, and held out his hand to his friend. "I congratulate you. The case is undoubtedly yours. Anyhow, such devotion as this little woman here, Mrs. Thurman, and that tongue-tied Lamont has shown, sure ought to have a reward. Go to it, Levering, and I won't fight you very hard."

Levering West "went to it," and in due time Miss Sally was tried and acquitted of the murder of Mrs. Luttrell.

It made a nine days' talk, the devotion of her and Lamont to the Thurmans, and also set another feather in that cap of Levering West's, which gathered some new adornment of that variety yearly.

CHAPTER XVII.

NOT A CHANCE.

"THE one thing I can't get over," I told Molly the night of Miss Sally's acquittal, as we all sat by the fire in the Tatlow drawing-room, "is the way that old maid lied to me. Anybody on earth would have believed her."

"It was a great case," said Kennard, with a long breath. "I knew Carstairs didn't do it."

"Well, it has taken pounds of flesh off me," said Mrs. Tatlow, pushing back her blond pompadour. "But it has taught Jamison, I hope, that it would be best to keep to the road after this."

"Aw, fudge!" growled her husband.

"It has taught me how much I love Peter," said my Molly, with her plump hand on my head. "What I went through while he was getting in windows and chasing around at nights, nobody will ever know. If it had only pulled those pounds of flesh off me, Mrs. Tatlow, I would now be perfectly content."

"It shows me I'm no six-eyed sleuth," I said, as I covered Molly's hand with my own. "I'll stick to the sporting page after this."

"Oh, I knew," said Betty Blakely suddenly, "that Hal Carstairs had never killed Mrs. Luttrell."

Kennard looked at her with an odd hurt in his eyes, and I noted it.

"Why, Betty?" I asked.

"Because," said the girl quietly, "he hasn't it in him to do anything that big—either in the right direction or the wrong."

Tom Kennard took Betty home that night. The Wedgely world was snowy and white and softly starlit.

The pretty homes lay asleep in soft banks of gleaming snow, and over her lynx furs Betty Blakely's face was more than ever like a rose.

"Betty," asked the young surgeon, after a moment, "did you mean what you said about Carstairs to-night?"

"Yes," said Betty quietly.

"Then, with him out of the running, have I a chance?" He bent to peer under the lynx cap.

A pair of wide, smiling violet eyes met his.

"Since *you* came *he* hasn't had a chance!" said Betty Blakely quietly.

DETECTIVES INVOLVED IN THEFTS

INDICTMENTS were handed up recently against Detective William Heydorn and Edward C. Burgess, of the second branch of New York's detective bureau, who are said to have acted in collusion with burglars and receivers of stolen goods. Both detectives are charged with burglary, bribery, accepting unlawful fees, and compounding a felony.

The arrest of the detectives followed the confession of Isador Pindek, of No. 51 East Ninety-seventh Street, and two receivers, to District Attorney Swann. Heydorn, according to the statement of Pindek, who was known as the go-between, countenanced the burglary of the loft of Fithian & Co., at No. 104 East Twenty-fifth Street. Pindek accuses Heydorn of receiving more also than seven hundred dollars as his share of the sale of the stolen goods, valued at eight thousand dollars and disposed of for two thousand dollars. All were recovered by Detectives McCoy, Daly, and Whitney.

Detective Burgess was indicted for his alleged connection with the burglary of the Semour Cravat Company in East Twenty-third Street. Five thousand dollars' worth of silks were stolen from their loft. According to the statement of Pindek, Burgess stood guard while the crime was being committed, and had arranged to signal the burglars by kicking twice on the door if it became necessary for them to flee. Afterward Burgess is said to have received three hundred and sixty-eight dollars to be divided equally between four detectives, two of whom have not been named.

Green Eyes

by Ellis Parker Butler

Author of "Chicken Bait," "Hidden Death," etc.

HENNY the Hick slid out of detective headquarters silently and stood a moment just outside the door before he turned down the corridor toward the stairway. As always, he had the hunted look, his narrow face otherwise expressionless except for the air of discontent with life, which expression was due to the downward turn at the corner of his mouth. His eyes never lost that look of a hunted dog, almost appealing and altogether sullen. You knew him at a glance as a silent man, and the same glance made you think he must be a crook. He had the air of one.

He was a crook, but not a big one. He sold heroin, the little white powder tablets that crush easily in the hand and are snuffed by the habit victims. He called it "coke." He was a coke fiend himself and had to have it. He knew where to get it and how to carry it, and how to have none on him when a suspicious "bull" pinched him. He had never been caught with the goods on him; since he had left Manhattan to work the graft on Long Island, not one member of the coke squad of plain-clothes men had been able to so much as nab one of Henny the Hick's customers in a manner to make evident the fact that the stuff had been supplied by Henny. He was careful, Henny was. He dealt only with guys he knew were "right."

His secret of safety was twofold. He did not peddle—he dealt. He was a middleman only. He knew where to get the coke, and he sold it to those who would peddle it, and not direct to the users. That was one of his safeguards. The other was fear. His customers were afraid of him.

"Me, I'm a T. B.," he would tell them, tapping his hollow chest. "I'm a lunger, see? To-day, to-morrow maybe, I'll get mine, so what do I care? What diff'rence does it make to me whether I sit down in a death chair or flop over on the walk some day? 'Sall the same to me. But nobody squeals on me, see? The guy what squeals gets his quick, and he's waiting for me in hell when I get there."

They believed him. Patsy Rogan, caught selling the goods, took his term rather than squeal on Henry the Hick, although he could have gone before the grand jury and, by giving his testimony against Henny, been set free. All he needed to say was "I got the coke off of Hen the Hick," but he said: "I didn't get it off nobody. Naw, I found it. I was goin' along, lookin' in the gutter, and I seen a sort of bundle there——"

"Are you afraid of this man, Henry the Hick?" he was asked.

"Naw, I ain't afraid of him, because I don't know no such guy. I don't know who you are talkin' about. I never heard of nobody by that name."

He had them all frightened, Henny had. He was rather contemptuous of human beings, he knew their frailties so well. There was but one man he feared, the man who had a bigger grouch than himself—big Burke. He hated big Burke, and he was afraid of him.

Big Burke—his fellows called him the Big Grouch—had been annoying to Henny the Hick in Manhattan, where Burke had been put on the coke squad when the fight against the stuff was taken up in earnest. It was because he did not like the Big Grouch that Henny the Hick had moved his activity to Long Island. He had a hunch that the Big Grouch was bad medicine for him, and he slid quietly over the bridge to be out of his way.

Now the Big Grouch had followed him. As he stepped out of the building into the cold breeze of the Bridge Plaza, Henny the Hick paused again. He was trying to decide whether he ought to beat it for Chicago, or perhaps try the Bronx. If he went to the Bronx he could still use his present source of supply, but the Big Grouch might be sent up there any day. If Centre Street had decided to "get" him, and was making a point of it, the Big Grouch would certainly follow him to the Bronx sooner or later. On the other hand, if he went to Chicago, he might have freedom from Burke, but he would have to find a new wholesaler and establish new connections with buyers. He felt too tired to go all through that. He stood on the step and buttoned his coat and turned up his collar, gazing at the walk sullenly. He let his mind go over the interview he had just finished, trying to fathom what had been behind the Big Grouch's green eyes, and suddenly his own eyes grew hard.

"Fajetti!" he breathed. "That's what he's got on me!"

The interview with Burke had been short. Calladay, the plain-clothes man, had run across Henny somewhere down near the old ferryhouse.

"Burke wants to see you," he told Henny.

"What's he want? I ain't been doing nothing," Henny had expostulated. "I ain't working the coke over here. I'm sick. I'm all run down. I come over here where the air is good because the gas out of them motor cars over across the bridge makes me cough my lungs out."

"Yeah? Well, you can tell that to Burke. All I know is he said if I run across you to tell you he wanted to see you."

"Over the bridge?" asked Henny.

"Naw! He's up at Queens headquarters, on the Bridge Plaza. You phone up there and ask him what he wants, if you want to. I've done what he told me to."

"Is he up there now?" asked Henny.

"Phone up and find out, if you want to know. I've done all that was up to me to do."

It was annoying by its very casual quality. Henny the Hick knew what this meant; if he did not go now, he would meet Burke's request at every corner and every hour. Every bull and plain-clothes man would stop him to tell him Burke wanted to see him. The barkeepers would whisper it to him. Men he had never seen would stop him and say: "Ain't you the guy they calls Henny the Hick? Well, Burke wants to see you." It was as well to get it over with. Burke, coming into the Queens district, wanted to hook up the loose ends. Henny slid into the corner saloon and called Burke on the telephone.

"Say," he said, "this is Henny. You want I should come up there? Well, I'm coming right now, see? You ain't got nothing on me, anyway."

He had rather expected the office to have in it two or three men in addition to Burke. He knew exactly how many plain-clothes men were in Queens, and how many were assigned especially to coke-squad work. He had expected they would all be there to give him the once over, sitting at their desks, perhaps, with their backs to him. Burke was alone.

The office was small and rather

crowded with furniture. It might have been the office of a company of some sort that had outgrown its quarters. At the rear were two ordinary office-building windows. Burke sat with his back to these, but the light was good enough to let Henny see all his features, especially the eyes; it was at the eyes Henny looked first, when he raised his head after he entered. He believed Burke had the ugliest eyes in the world.

Burke was a big man and broad-shouldered, and he had grown too stout. His face was heavier than Henny's, but fully as sullen; it was the face of a man with a heavy disgust of life. It was none of Henny's business, but he knew why Burke was disgusted with life—the gossip could not have failed to reach him: Burke's wife made him sick of existence. Burke hated his wife and his wife hated him. They said she blew in all his money and then nagged and scolded him; and every morning he had a grouch that lasted all day. It made him surly and silent, and gave him his names—Silent Burke and the Big Grouch. He was not a favorite, and he did not care to be. He was sore on the world.

Deep down under the grouch was an idea that he might have gone high in the force if he had had a right wife. He had joined when money helped a man to advancement, and he had tried to save the money; but his wife was a spender and a nagger, and she nagged him until he had given her the money, and then she had spent it and he had gotten nowhere. He never expected to get anywhere, and he blamed his wife for it.

"Well?" he growled when Henny the Hick stood before him, fingering his hat.

"You sent for me, Silent; what you want of me?"

Burke shuffled his papers about and pushed them from him disgustedly. He let his ugly green eyes rest on Henny's face a moment.

"You know what I want," he said. "I want you."

"But, Silent, I ain't been doing nothing," whined Henny. "My tubes got so punk I couldn't stand it over across the bridge, so I had to come over here where the air didn't choke me. What you think you've got against me, Silent?"

Burke did not answer. Henny turned his hat in his hand.

"You think I been handling coke, don't you?" said Henny. "You think because I'm over here I'm handling coke, but I ain't. You just heard I was over here and you got it into your head I was handling coke. You've got it in for me, that's all."

He said this in a tone of sullen discouragement, and he looked sullen and discouraged. Burke made no sign.

"No matter what I did over across the bridge," Henny whined on, "I'm straight over here. You can't understand that a man with the T. B. wants to get to somewhere so he won't cough his tubes to pieces all day and all night. You can't understand that a man might want to get away from the noise so he can die in peace. I'm a dead man, Silent. Leave me alone. Let me hang around and die, and I'll be West in a couple of months."

Burke shifted his eyes from Henny's face for a moment. His own face showed no new expression, only the same sullenness.

"Come across!" he said.

Henny uttered an oath. "Come across!" he said with disgust. "Ain't I told you I ain't done nothing to come across with? You've been hounding me so long you've got the habit, that's all."

Burke swung his chair and looked at the large calendar on the wall. He was supremely indifferent to what Henny might say.

"You ain't got nothing on me!"

Henny declared, with the first show of anger.

Big Burke did not answer. He turned his head and looked out of the window. He could see the top of the factory on the side street. Wasting time with this little rat of a crook, when, but for his fool of a wife, he might be where he belonged!

"Well, what have you got on me, then?" asked Henny.

"All right," said Burke; "if you don't want to come across, don't! I gave you your chance. The next time it will be different. Get out!"

"You ain't got a right to talk to me that way," said Henny sullenly.

The Big Grouch did not hear him. He was thinking of his wife and the note she had sent over by a boy, asking for twenty dollars to be sent her by return messenger. He pushed his papers around until he found the note. He glared at it and put it in his pocket. Henny watched him closely.

"All right; get out!" said Burke, turning his green eyes on the coke dealer again.

"You don't want me no more?" asked Henny.

Burke did not answer. He looked at Henny thoughtfully, and the smaller man thought he was studying the thing —trying to decide whether to hold him now or wait until some evidence or other was strengthened and the chain made unbreakable, but Burke was not thinking of Henny the Hick. What did he care for Henny the Hick? He had sent for him, yes! He had meant to throw a scare into him, but what was the use? What if he did make a swell record cleaning up the coke business in Queens? Where would it get him? Nowhere, as long as he had this wife bleeding him dry. What was it all worth? Let the little rat go!

Henny stood a few seconds, then turned and went out and down to the street; the Big Grouch took up his hat and put it on. He looked out of the window again, standing a long while working himself into greater sullenness and self-exasperation.

Presently Henny, down on the street, turned and hurried toward the rickety frame building where he made his home. He entered the narrow hall without knocking and slid quietly up the stairs and into his room. When he came down again he had a revolver in his pocket and a more silent but equally deadly weapon hanging from the belt of his trousers. He boarded a trolley car that came across the Queensborough Bridge. It was a Flushing car, which was what he wanted, for the man he wanted to see had agreed to meet him that afternoon in the place where they usually met. As the car passed the building where he had so recently met Burke, Henny the Hick turned his head and looked across the Bridge Plaza. It is quite a distance across the Plaza, but Henny was sure he made out the heavy form and gray suit of the Big Grouch standing before the building. In this he was wrong. Big Burke was still standing before the window in the office, looking out upon the blank wall of a factory building, and still nursing his grouch against his wife. He had put Henny the Hick entirely out of his mind. What did he care for the sneaking little rat? What did he care for anything? If he did manage to save a couple of dollars his wife was not satisfied until she got them.

The car on which Henny the Hick rode turned from the Bridge Plaza into Jackson Avenue and stopped at the point where passengers transferred from the Hunters' Point shuttle car. All the cars stopped here, and the stop was nothing unusual; but Henny the Hick was annoyed. He could look down the Bridge Plaza now and he made out the big man in the gray suit clearly enough. The big man was no longer standing in front of the office building; he was

walking at an unobtrusively hurried step toward the car. Henny the Hick looked out of the car door and saw that the car following was a College Point car, and uttered a short oath under his breath.

The College Point car followed the same route as the Flushing car all the way to Flushing before it branched off from Jackson Avenue. If the man in the gray suit was Burke, and he caught the College Point car, he would trail Henny all the way to Flushing. Luckily the Flushing car started immediately and the College Point car waited. Or was it so lucky? The distance widened between the two cars, but Burke, if it was Burke, would have time to catch the second car if it waited long. Henny was uneasy. He felt better as the Flushing car sped along, making—as it seemed—unusually good time. He looked out of the window of the rear door, from where he sat, now and then, and he was glad to see the College Point car was quite lost in the distance.

The job Henny the Hick had given himself to do was not a pleasant one. He had thought over the interview with the Big Grouch, and he had made his decision. Fajetti had thrown him! Henny the Hick had been on the carpet times enough to think he knew a thing or two, and he had not liked the way Burke had treated him. Time and again he had been called up and questioned, but never like this. They had always tried to trap him, to get him talking, and then, when he said this or that, they had thrown a trap question at him, but the Big Grouch had not done this. The Big Grouch had acted as if he had Henny where he wanted him.

They were always after the man higher up, those plain-clothes men. If they nabbed a coke fiend they tried to get him to peach on the coke peddler; if they got the peddler they tried to get him to peach on the middleman. From the way Burke had treated him Henny felt that the Big Grouch had got him and got him right, and was trying to make him peach on his wholesaler, the man from whom he drew his inexhaustible supply of coke. Henny had gone over in his mind the ways in which Burke could have got him, and he could think of but one man who might have squealed on him. That man was Fajetti. There were things about Fajetti he did not like, little things that looked big now, and he decided that Fajetti had thrown him. Fajetti, he decided, was a stool pigeon. Fajetti, he decided, had been bought by the police. If that were so, and Henny meant to know the truth, Fajetti would get all that was coming to him.

The afternoon was waning and darkness was setting in before the car swung around the edge of the bay into Flushing. The conductor had switched on the electrics and so had the conductor of the College Point car behind, and by its headlight Henny saw that the following car was gaining, and gaining rapidly. Perhaps the Big Grouch had whispered a word to the motorman!

At the Flushing Bridge the Flushing car slowed down and Henny, looking back, made sure the big man in gray was standing on the platform of the following car, beside the motorman. Across the bridge the Flushing car stopped to permit the passenger for Jamaica to transfer, and Henny got up and went to the door. The motorman of the College Point car had thrown open the curtained front doors of his car to allow exit by the front way, and in the light thus thrown on the platform Henny made out the man in gray more clearly. It was not the Big Grouch. He was sure of that now. He went back into the car and seated himself again. He kept his eye on the College Point car and on the passengers who left it. The man in gray was not among those who left the car before it swung around the curve and started

on its way to College Point. So it was all right. Henny felt much better.

When the car reached Main Street Henny got off and crossed the street. It was quite dark now, and Henny walked back along the route he had followed until he came to the darker street below the railway tracks. He turned up this to his right and stepped into the shadow of a tree and waited. He was in no hurry. He stood for a full half hour, but nothing happened. He walked on then to the end of the block, and by devious ways, until he had crossed the railway and had come to the old stable. Here, too, he stood in the shadow a while, but there was nothing to arouse his suspicion. He pushed open the door and entered.

The place was cold—colder than the outer air, it seemed. It was dark, except for the dim light that came through the small window, not much bigger than a man's hand, and this light was but the light of an unclouded sky. Henny put out his hand and touched a wheel—the wheel of a wagon. He heard Fajetti's two horses crunching corn in their stalls. Gradually his eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, and he made out the outlines of things, of the light wagon with its string of bells hung between two uprights, of the piles of rags and stacks of old newspapers, and of a heap of old rubber boots and discarded rubber tires. He seated himself on a pile of newspapers and lighted a cigarette. He sat with his elbows on his knees, thinking.

He was still sitting thus when Fajetti entered. The Italian came in briskly, carrying a tubular barn lantern, which he hung on a stick nailed on an upright of the stable.

"I keep you waiting too long?" he asked.

Henny arose. He kept one hand in his pocket; the other touched the length of lead pipe that hung from his belt.

"No. I don't mind waiting," said Henny the Hick, without expression. "When I got business to do I don't mind waiting."

"That's right," said Fajetti cheerfully—too cheerfully. Henny the Hick weighed the words and the tone, and found them false. They were too hearty; they were not the words of a coke fiend, a nervous wreck, as Fajetti should be if he had not lied. The Italian turned his back for an instant.

When the lead pipe struck him he fell forward against the wagon and slid down between the two wheels. He was grotesque thus, but Henny the Hick did not consider his grotesqueness. He bent over him and found that he was dead, and he dragged the body away from the wagon and toward the rear of the stable. Here he rested while he considered what to do next. He saw that the boards of the floor were loosely laid, and he looked about for some tool to pry them up; he found an iron bar.

The boards yielded easily, and he did not so much as indent their edges. He drew them up, disclosing a hole underneath, and he drew the body thither and placed it there, and replaced the boards. He worked slowly, coughing now and then, but using the utmost care to remove all traces of his work. Now and then he stopped to listen, but he heard no sound to cause him anxiety. He was utterly alone, and he could take his time. He took down the lantern and examined the boards with minute care, bending low so that his eyes might miss no telltale detail. He rubbed dirt gently along the edges of the boards where he had placed the iron rod; he rubbed dirt into the nail holes.

He felt a mild elation as he worked. This man had been a stool pigeon and had received what he deserved, he felt. The only man who had ever peached on Henny the Hick had got what Henny the Hick had always promised such. Stool pigeons would remember this, when it came out.

He did not worry about the time when it would come to be known. A week, a month, would pass before it was known, so carefully had he done the job and so carefully hidden traces of it. Before that time was up he would be far away. He would start at once, in a few minutes, for the West, where his lungs would have a chance and where he could lose himself somewhere in the high hills. It was a good job, and no man could connect him with it, even after the—after It was discovered.

He was bending over the wagon wheels now, searching them in the light of the lantern for any trace that must be removed, when he felt, suddenly, that he was observed. It was a weird feeling, and he tried to shake it off—he needed coke, that was what was the matter, he argued. But the feeling grew. He raised the lantern and searched the dark corners with his eyes. Nothing! Nobody!

He tried to resume his work again, but the feeling grew. He turned his head sharply from side to side, peering into the semidarkness. He walked into the stalls, where the horses stood, and felt under the mangers. He climbed the narrow stairs to the loft. There was nothing there, no place where any one could hide to spy on him. He came down again and stood motionless.

Some one was watching him! He began to tremble, fear stricken, and then his eyes fell on the small window, now black against the sky. There, glittering green, and intent on his every motion, were a pair of eyes—green eyes there was no mistaking. They did not move, did not blink; they only stared with all-intent interest. Henny the Hick wet his dry lips with the tip of his tongue. The Big Grouch had seen all! A sickness, a rage, filled the soul of the man; rage that the Silent had let him work these many minutes. He was insane with hate for the Big Grouch who could do this in this way. He was maddened by the big, sullen indifference of the man who could look on silently. Eyes! That was what the Big Grouch was, eyes that stared—green, ugly eyes that stared, that saw everything and said nothing.

All this in an instant, together with the sickness of hopelessness, and then the pistol flashed once toward the hand's breadth of window and the green, staring eyes, and again toward the heart of Henny the Hick, who fell in a crumpled heap on the stable floor as the cat on the manure heap outside the window leaped away into the night, frightened by the pistol report and the crashing of the bullet as it pierced the boards of the stable wall.

NOT A WAR INDUSTRY

FROM the latest reports of government sharps, the ancient and dishonorable art of counterfeiting has suffered considerable setback because of the present war. The increased cost of nonprecious metals out of which the spurious coins are made is largely responsible for the present slump in the profession, together with the large wages offered honest labor nowadays.

But coinage counterfeiting has not alone suffered from the effects of the war. The issuance of spurious bank notes has been depressed by the increased cost of the tools and materials needed. Meanwhile, the government has been working twenty-four hours a day to keep the country sufficiently supplied with bonds and currency. Perhaps some of our master counterfeiters are now kept busy making real money for the government and us. We are sure their talents are needed in such good work.

The Great Voldane

by George Edgar

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

LADY BREMBERG is one of the many victims of burglaries which occur at various places in England, but which are attributed to the same perpetrator. After Inspector Blackstone, of Scotland Yard, has been trying to recover Lady Bremberg's pearl necklace for a week and has failed, Sir Digby Bremberg puts the case in the hands of Raymond Metcalfe, a man of leisure whose chief interest in life is the search of adventure, and who has established a reputation for himself as a solver of crime mysteries. Metcalfe and his friend, Doctor Colville, who narrates the story, go to Scarborough, where Lady Bremberg's necklace was stolen, to investigate. On the way Metcalfe expresses a great interest in a hypnotist, the Great Voldane, and on the train en route to Leicester, they meet him. When the train reaches Leicester, Metcalfe and the doctor set out for Voldane's hotel.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ZITHER'S SPELL.

AT the London and County, Leicester's most palatial hotel, we found some difficulty in getting rooms. Not a big place, the hotel was distinctly strained by the requirements of the Great Voldane.

I found out afterward that his party consisted of nearly a dozen people. There was Voldane, his wife—the faded but showy woman who had joined the artiste at the railway station—the two girls, and the man we had seen traveling with him in the same carriage. A secretary, who lived more or less with Voldane and his intimates, carried out the functions of personal press agent to the showman. There were also servants—Voldane's valet, who doubled with it the rôle of dresser—and two maids, who attended the three ladies at the hotel and the theater.

Altogether, Voldane's personal entourage was a tax on the resources of a provincial hotel laying itself out for the casual patronage of business men and commercial travelers. They not only needed bedrooms for the whole of the party, with dressing rooms in several cases; the Great Voldane also monopolized a private dining room, a couple of sitting rooms, and a large apartment the hotel called its drawing-room.

I called the latter, and other drawing-rooms Voldane occupied in different cities and towns, the cave of mysteries. In them he exhibited himself very much as Metcalfe has seen him display his personality in Paris. These displays, taking the character of a séance, with music, dancing, eerie effects, and mystic manifestations, may have pleased the soul of the theatrical charlatan. For myself, I became more and more inclined to regard him as a man much too clever to be impressed by the noise of his own thunder—to be amazed by his own mystic rites. Metcalfe agreed with me in believing these carefully prepared private séances were part of the machinery of the show.

They were turned on for the benefit of pressmen and callers who might influence publicity.

Metcalfe had a further theory. He believed the séances were run as money-making private displays of Voldane's mystic powers, to which dupes were introduced immediately they showed signs of being prepared to part with their money for an introduction to the holy of holies. Color was subsequently lent to this by the character of Voldane's visitors. Many came from a distance and stayed with the showman, joining him and his entourage at what I may describe as the family board.

We succeeded in getting bedrooms, on the drawing-room floor, after much parley with the clerk of the hotel.

It was late in the afternoon when we arrived, and, in deference to the Sabbath, and provincial care for servants, we had our evening meal served almost immediately.

Since his arrival, Metcalfe had been very thoughtful. I could see his mind was working steadily at the points of a problem he had set out to solve. Also, knowing his methods, I realized the direction the inquiry was taking, and the reason we were in Leicester.

Metcalfe had finished his meal before he seemed disposed to talk.

He suddenly pushed his plate aside, lit a cigarette, and, leaving the table, dropped quietly onto the couch in the room we had engaged.

"Well," he said, with an ironical smile, "what think you of Leicester?"

"A dull place on Sunday afternoon for the incoming stranger," I replied.

"Voldane will cheer things up," Metcalfe replied easily.

"Yes," I agreed, "Leicester is a first-rate show town, and a decent field for a burglar as well. Some of the Leicester magnates have property of real value lying about their smug mansions."

"Ah!" Metcalfe eyed me quizzically. "I mystified the stalwart Blackstone. He thinks I am quite mad."

"He will be surprised if your burglary comes off as you prophesied it would," I replied.

"Then I did not mystify you—eh?" He looked at me with a mocking gleam in his clear, bright eyes.

"No; the steps are obvious, so far," I replied. "You are interested in the Great Voldane as a key to the series of burglaries."

Metcalfe nodded.

"Go on, wise man," he jeered. "Nothing can be hidden from that wonderful eye of yours."

"It does seem simple," I said, carefully choosing my words.

"Yet it dazed Blackstone," Metcalfe suggested.

"He had not seen you scanning the theatrical papers," I returned.

Metcalfe's eyes seemed to glitter again. A brightening of his keen eyes was a sure indication that he was pleased.

"Yes," he agreed, "you are right. Up to the moment, the inquiry is simple enough. You can go over the lines I have followed, and convince me that the thing looks as simple as it really is."

"Well, a burglary happens once a week, in towns and cities of a well-marked character," I volunteered.

He nodded his head, encouragingly.

"Naturally, any inquiry would begin by determining whether the towns were chosen accidentally—that is, captiously—or by design," I explained. "There are two clear areas of choice. Either the burglar had business in the towns chosen, or he passed from one town to the other haphazard. His guiding principle, in either case, would be just as good for his purpose, only, if there were a set reason for the choice, the detective's task might become easier."

Metcalfe blew a cloud of cigarette smoke into the air.

"Just so," he said emphatically.

"What would have puzzled me at the beginning is just where to start investigating the first question—whether or not business drew the desperadoes to the towns attacked in the successive weeks. I should certainly have thought of the theater and theatrical people, but not in the first moment of the inquiry. There must be a regular army of men moving from city to city and town to town, week by week—commercial men, singers, mechanics, sportsmen, demonstrators of one sort or another, and so on. Why do you seize upon the theater as a forcing house for criminals?"

Metcalfe simply laughed uproariously.

"Luck—just luck," he said, when he had recovered himself. "If I had gone to Scarborough first, as Blackstone did, I should have had to face all the possibilities you outline, and might have overlooked the stage altogether. The finding of a man in Scarborough who, prior to visiting that town, had spent previous Friday nights in Manchester and Blackpool, would be as difficult as seeking for a needle in a haystack, or worse."

"That does not answer my question," I pointed out.

"No," Metcalfe replied. "But I happened to get Sir Digby Bremberg's note on the Thursday morning before he looked me up on the Friday after the Scarborough burglary. I had the dates and the details of the series of burglaries by me. And I spent the day thinking out the possibilities exactly as you have done. I thought of all the people who might go from town to town on business, just as you did, and among them were, of course, touring actors. Just because they are the only class of professional workers who can be traced easily, I looked into the movements of theatrical companies. A study of the files of the professional papers told me all I wanted to know."

"There were two companies in Scarborough performing that week, and perhaps forty individual vaudeville artistes," I suggested.

"Yes," replied Metcalfe. "On the Thursday afternoon I accounted for them all. The theatrical papers are full of minute details. They tell you where a company is one week in the professional criticisms; where it is traveling the next week appears in the touring list. Even the smallest company likely to play Scarborough can be traced, if you look over a file of the theatrical papers. Vaudeville artists and companies playing in variety theaters are just as easy to follow. The notices of the week show where they are, even when they are not on the long tours booked with the syndicate houses."

I saw clearly the line of investigation.

"Many companies and variety performers had been in two of the towns when the burglaries occurred, in successive weeks," Metcalfe explained. "Several had been in most of the towns named. But the luck of the inquiry was with me, for only one company was revealed as playing successively in Birmingham, Darlington, Blackpool, Manchester, and Scarborough, on the nights when the burglaries were committed in the order of the towns named."

"Voldane's crew," I ejaculated.

"Of course," Metcalfe said, with a smile. "Voldane's mysterious agglomeration of all the talents. I drew a long bow by predicting a burglary at Liverpool—because Voldane's party went to Liverpool from Scarborough. I am hazarding the Leicester prophecy on the same foundation."

I found Metcalfe smiling through a haze of cigarette smoke as I looked up thoughtfully.

"Is it as simple as that?" I said, with a note of disappointment in my voice.

"Just as simple as that—so far," he replied readily.

"A matter of an arrest to-morrow." I must confess I was disappointed.

"No—it is not nearly as simple as that," he continued. "The luck is with us at the finger post on the crossroads. It points the right way. And it leaves us in Leicester."

"But surely Voldane must know something——" I began.

Metcalfe shrugged his shoulders.

"Voldane awakens one's suspicions naturally because he is probably a humbug and a charlatan," Metcalfe pointed out. "In a melodrama, Voldane would necessarily be the thief. But, in this investigation, he may come out as innocent as the babe unborn. You think of Voldane—fakir, mystery monger, trance specialist, and hypnotist; of his extravagant get-up and habits; and of his vile, cheap melodramatic appearance as the villain of the piece. After all, he is a showman before everything, and the way he stages his life spells business for him. But you must not forget one fact."

He paused before breaking my questioning silence.

"Voldane carries more than thirty people with him about the country," Metcalfe pointed out. "At least eight of them are men. All of them are apparently clever, traveled, and cosmopolitan. Any one might be the thief, working alone. Voldane is only responsible for his people on the stage."

I saw the full force of his argument.

"The thief is certainly connected with Voldane," Metcalfe said decisively. "But the problem—and you will see that it bristles with difficulties—is that thirty or more people are involved. The possessor of Lady Bremberg's necklace might be any member of the company from the baggage man to Voldane himself."

"Yet Voldane has the sort of brain that would delight in exercising its cleverness in a criminal manner," I suggested, jumping to a conclusion.

Metcalf smiled.

"One naturally feels that," Metcalfe answered. "And there in this sweetly simple problem, our boat bumps up against the first snag."

"Why?" I asked curiously.

"Well, at Scarborough I did conduct an inquiry," Metcalfe explained, "despite the fact that Blackstone thought I was merely idling. Thanks to Dundas, the theatrical manager, at Scarborough, I have a clear idea of Voldane's movements on Friday night—the night of the Scarborough burglary. He entered the theater at eight o'clock. He played from nine until ten minutes past ten. He left his dressing room half an hour later with Dundas, and spent an hour in the theater buffet, amusing a mixed audience consisting of pressmen, employees of the theater, and a little crowd of well-to-do men about town."

"Sir Digby believed the bungalow burglary took place about eleven o'clock," I mused.

"Yes," replied Metcalfe, thoughtfully, "and Voldane, slightly elated with champagne, was playing with his snakes in the theater buffet after the hall had emptied, and did not leave the Paragon Music Hall until a quarter to twelve. What is more, he took Dundas back to the hotel, made him a piquant supper on a chafing dish, and kept him there long after the ladies had retired, talking wildly of a mad electrical scheme he has invented to put an end to all wars."

"And that clears Voldane," I murmured.

Metcalfe pulled at his cigarette and lapsed into a moody silence. When he spoke again, five minutes later, he answered as if I had only just put my last question.

"Does it?" he asked thoughtfully.

"What I cannot understand is why the burglar selects Friday nights for his attacks, and why you back the same nights in the future for your prophecies," I suggested pointedly.

Metcalfe lit another cigarette and smoked it slowly. He looked through the whirling clouds, his somber, thoughtful eyes fixed on me. The minutes passed as we sat facing each other in the quiet hotel room. The cigarette was exhausted before Metcalfe spoke. And again, when he broke the silence, it seemed to me that he spoke as if the thought I had last uttered were still on his mind.

"Friday—ah!—Friday," he said, suddenly standing upright. "Yes—I had meant to think about Friday. Why, Colville, old friend, that's the most sensible remark you have made to-day. In crime, every question has its answer, and every question raised should be made to yield a reply. We will turn our attention to compelling your question to yield its answer. 'Why Friday?'"

He moved toward the door.

"Let's go and look this hotel lot over," he said lazily.

I went with him along the corridor.

As we approached the staircase, I heard music—the music of the zither, the haunting music which had cast its spell over me in the train.

"Odd," said Metcalfe, slowing down. "Whether he is an artistic thief on the big lay or not—Voldane is an odd fish. From what Dundas, of Scarborough, told me, Voldane's hospitality at the theater on the night of the burglary had made him rather stupid. After more champagne at supper, he had but a hazy notion of the after proceedings at Voldane's hotel. He was full of one incident only—Voldane, in a weird robe and wearing a fez, playing with black snakes. He spoke of the music, too—of the music made by a thin, withered old man who fingered a zither. I remember Dundas, who is of what I call the thick-headed type, does not deal in fine phrases. But he described that melancholy zither music very aptly."

"How?" I asked.

"He said it made him feel as if he were taking more drink," Metcalfe replied, his face grimly intent on a new thought. "Dundas says he remembers the old man playing the zither music and Voldane crooning to his snakes. The music got on his nerves and made him melancholy. All he can recall of the end of the evening is that, with the two men intent on their curious employments, he sat crying in his armchair, and that later—or early in the morning—he fell asleep. Voldane aroused him and sent him home in a car still hanging about the hotel door."

The music stole after us as we strode along the passage.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN INVITATION.

SUNDAY evening proved a succession of dull hours in the London and County Hotel.

After a turn about the town, we returned to the hotel and spent the remainder of the evening in its chief public guest room—a large but shabbily furnished apartment, half lounge and half smoking room, on the first floor.

The business men who made the house a commercial rendezvous were away on their week-end pleasures. Metcalfe quickly noted, however, that the big room had its Sunday uses, too, for it proved a meeting place for all the theatrical folk who had assembled to play Leicester during the following week.

Metcalf had a faculty of mixing readily enough on occasion, and my breath was taken away through sheer surprise at the rapidity with which I became a part of the floating theatrical assemblage drifting about me.

The people present were mostly drawn from the more prosperous elements in theatrical life, and odd persons some of them were indeed. There was Anthony Jelks, the touring manager,

with the massive brow, who spent his evening after dinner frowning thoughtfully, and trying to look like the popular busts of Shakespeare. He smoked a long cigar, held himself aloof, never smiled, but patronized a group of courtiers who sought him in his favorite corner. There was his wife, Olga, once a popular comedienne, now a favorite exponent of the tragic rôles, who floated about flirting with every one and talking utter nonsense in a deep contralto voice which made the glassware shiver.

Old Harry Boldface, the comedian, was present. A reigning star in the nineties, he still holds pride of place as an exponent of red-nosed humor. I found him living up to his rôle in life at Leicester, for he spent the evening absorbing an unlimited procession of brandies and sodas.

There, too, was Miss Zelia Duckwing, queen of the visiting musical comedy, with a noisy crowd of more youthful admirers about her. Among them were portly old actors, shabbily attired and gravely mellow, and dashing young actors, rather showily dressed. There were theatrical women of all classes, from the superbly gowned creatures who played leading parts and noisily let the world about them know the fact, to the demure, well-dressed beginners, walking on in small parts, who chattered in a subdued fashion, content to sit about in the shadows of the great.

I was surprised at Metcalfe's facility for picking up friends. We seemed to have a position and status in this traveling world of the theater before we had been half an hour in the big assembly room. I found out afterward that Metcalfe claimed to be inspecting the theaters as a press agent for the MacBurn syndicate, a disguise which served him well, as it justified him in appearing successively in the towns on Voldane's itinerary. He had gone so far as to secure a letter of appointment from one of the MacBurns who was his friend.

I was making the best of matters, in the strange company in which I found myself mingling, about nine o'clock. I was alone with Metcalfe for the moment, and aloof from the several noisy groups of professional people scattered about the big room.

Suddenly the door opened and Voldane made one of the dramatic entrances he studied and carried so carefully into effect.

I was conscious of his coming by the scowl that flitted across the face of Anthony Jelks. It seemed to express all his professional contempt and jealousy in one sudden change of countenance. Anthony Jelks evidently disapproved of Voldane as an artist, and possibly disliked him more because his entrance at that moment, professionally speaking, "stole all the limelight" in the setting.

A pair of folding doors were suddenly thrown open. Ella, the trance girl, walked slowly through the opening and into the room. She was dressed in a wonderfully dignified costume, deep bronze in color, of the hue of autumn leaves before they fall. A wrap was thrown about her round white throat. She hesitated a second, looking upon the company with her big, confiding eyes, perhaps conscious of the way the light beat upon her wonderful hair and shimmered in the folds of her strangely sumptuous gown. Then, apparently catching sight of friends, she spoke casually to the man following her, and walked with an almost regal grace across the now silent room.

But it was Voldane who held the stage—Voldane, the fakir, as I described him in my own mind. He followed the beautiful girl, Ella, and when she left him to cross the room, he remained, a solitary figure and the cynosure of all eyes.

He stood, his tall, thin, emaciated figure clothed in black. He was appa-

rently wearing evening clothes, but they were concealed by an overcoat reaching below his knees. Around his throat, though the day was warm, the coat ended in a massive collar of black fur, while heavy cuffs of the same material were about his gloved hands. Upon his head was a fur cap one rarely sees in Europe outside Russia. His white linen served to show up the swarthy face, the darkly penciled eyebrows, the long, clearly defined nose, and the thin, dilated nostrils. The eyes, the dense, brown eyes of the man, with the whites exaggerated by the coffee-colored skin, were his most telling feature. They seemed to fix and challenge every gaze turned toward him.

Voldane did not stop long in the assembly room. He strode across and greeted Jelks with a languid patronage that was almost an impertinence. He stood, standing with several of the more important theatrical people, pulling on his long black mustache and apparently listening to a desultory conversation without displaying any interest beyond occasionally baring his strong white teeth in a perfunctory smile.

Suddenly he walked across the room, in my direction, and strode up to the girl Ella, who was now seated among a prosperous-appearing party of youthful theatrical people.

I could hear all that passed between Voldane and the actress—perhaps all the people about the pair were meant to hear, for Voldane never seemed to lay his part aside.

He stood behind the girl, his gloved hand resting on her glowing braided hair.

"You will be quite happy here, little one," he said, in a smooth, deep voice.

The girl tilted her pale face upward, met his downward glance with a grateful flash of her beautiful eyes, so liquid and trustful as they caught the light.

"Of course, master," she said simply, and turned toward her friends.

Voldane moved his hand in a circular maner over her head, as if he were calling upon some mystic power to guard his devotee, or invoking a kindly blessing.

"Then adieu—until the half hour after ten," he said slowly.

"I shall remember," the girl replied, smiling as she turned toward him once more.

"The half hour after ten," Voldane said, in a slow, monotonous singsong.

Suddenly, he turned on his heels and strode with a stately—perhaps a stagy—step toward the folding doors.

"Quick," said Metcalfe, at my elbow. "He is going out."

Avoiding observation by abrupt movements, we made a leisurely pretense of leaving the room.

Voldane was standing on the stone steps of the main entrance to the hotel as we reached the street. Two Great Danes, in charge of one of the men we had seen in the train, were released. They leaped toward the actor, sprang playfully about his legs, and barked joyously. He subdued them into silence with a movement of his gloved forefinger, and, perfectly trained, they bounded on before him. The street was broad and spacious. Few people were about. Most, in passing, turned to note the strange figure who moved along in the gloom attended by the two huge Danes. We followed, many paces in the rear, lounging along in the manner of provincial strollers at nightfall.

Voldane seemed perfectly familiar with his surroundings. Once—twice, he walked round the hotel, which stood on an island platform. He sauntered in a leisurely fashion, idly tapping with the ferrule of his cane on the footwalk, keeping time with his own slow steps. In a quieter street, behind the hotel, which he seemed intent on walking round for the third time, he suddenly crossed over. We gave him a good start and followed, confident that he

would not single us out from the several people passing up and down.

At that moment he turned into an absolutely deserted byway, leading to what I now know as Ambrose Square, a residential area occupied by the wealthy inner-town dwellers of Leicester. In that silent street we had to give him a long lead to prevent Voldane forming any suspicion that we were treading on his heels.

Metcalfe halted irresolutely at the corner. I pulled up, following his example. I could see my friend was at once impatient, and at the same time afraid of pressing too closely on Voldane.

"But I must see how he spends his time on these solitary promenades," Metcalfe at last said, after fretting like a sensitive horse, on the sidewalk.

Voldane was at least two hundred yards in front of us—almost at the turning leading to the residential area of the square.

We started forward again, walking with studied nonchalance, laughing and talking loudly.

Almost as soon as we began to move and to talk, Voldane, without halting, turned in his tracks. We could see him coming toward us, his white linen gleaming, his cigarette end a spark of fire in the gloom, the shadowy shapes of the massive dogs bounding in front of him.

Metcalfe kept on and we advanced, still talking and laughing. I felt confident that we had done nothing to excite Voldane's suspicions. We were obliged to carry on and advance, in the face of his abrupt alteration of his course.

Voldane's striking figure loomed nearer and nearer, until I could see the texture of the fur on his cap and collar, the waxed ends of his mustache, the outlines made by his tumbling mass of hair, and the gleam of his wild, strained eyes.

He walked so that he would have passed between us, and when we both stepped to the right to give him way he altered his course until he still advanced facing us, with the two huge dogs bounding along in front of him. We hesitated, as men do under such circumstances, and at once he was close upon us. Again Voldane abruptly halted—dead in front of us, impeding our progress and delaying his own.

"Why do you follow me?" he asked smoothly, in his deep bass voice. There was no anger in the tone he employed. He might have been making a polite inquiry about the way or the time. I could see there was anger in the glint of his eyes, which seemed to reveal unpleasing lights in the darkness, like a cat's.

"You are mistaken, sir," Metcalfe said promptly and courteously. "We are not following you."

Voldane spoke again, his voice full of the same smooth politeness, his eyes still glinting weirdly, and leading me to suspect the demoniac temper which is sometimes periodically revealed by ill-balanced minds.

"One word from me, young men," Voldane said, "and my dogs will spring at your throats. Here, Sultan, Wallace—be ready."

The dogs suddenly ceased their dignified frisking, and stiffened and snarled at his feet.

"Why do you follow me?" Voldane insisted.

"Again, I say you are mistaken," Metcalfe replied readily. "We are strangers here, staying at the hotel and killing time."

"Ah!" said Voldane, tapping the stones with the tip of his cane. "The Great Voldane never makes mistakes. I know you follow me. I know by my wonderful instinct—the sense that makes me the Great Voldane."

"Your instinct is usually right in the theater," Metcalfe said laughingly. "As a humble worker on the stage, the only

way I should like to follow you is to imitate your successful steps as a showman."

As he spoke, Metcalfe handed Voldane a card.

He glanced at it, aided by the light of a street lamp.

"Metcalfe—Raymond Metcalfe," Voldane said aloud. "Aha!—of the MacBurn Syndicate. One of us, eh? They are my present taskmasters. Allow me to apologize."

His manner suddenly changed. Perhaps he regarded our explanation as reasonable, or maybe he regretted his own strange lack of control. Yes, and such was the colossal vanity of the man that he may have regarded us as small fry of the theater, following him as hero worshipers. At all events, he at once became graciously and effusively apologetic.

"You know me," he said. "The Great Voldane—the Great Voldane, who will be greater still; indeed so great that the whole world will be as astounded. My mind, my unconquerable will, requires solitude, and the groundlings press upon me when I would be alone. Forgive me. I thought you were merely idlers intruding on my privacy."

"You have a strange way with intruders," Metcalfe said, laughing easily.

"Oh, it is only a theatrical threat," Voldane said suavely. "The dogs are as harmless as babies. You would not bite, would you, Sultan—Wallace?"

He caressed the animals fawning before him.

"But, come," he said, pretending to be aware of our presence again. "You are brother travelers, bored by these provincial towns. I know the feeling, for I have moved through them for years. The great must at least be kindly in their kingliness. What do you say to a little supper, brothers? And, after, I can show you matters you have not seen—matters you perhaps have never thought of."

"With all the pleasure in the world," Metcalfe said heartily.

We turned and resumed our walk with Voldane, this time as his guests, and the two Great Danes preceding us.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BREMBERG NECKLACE.

WE arrived back at the hotel with Voldane and his dogs, shortly after ten o'clock. Before the main entrance, one of Voldane's male servants was promenading in a leisurely fashion, smoking a cigarette. On seeing Voldane, he threw the lighted cigarette away and stood at attention. Voldane did not speak a word to him as he passed, but I noted that, at a sign from the hypnotist, the Danes transferred themselves from the custody of their master to that of the servant, who walked away with them in the direction of the rear of the hotel.

We stood with Voldane in the main entrance.

"You are staying here?" he said, lighting a cigarette and still maintaining his more cordial manner. "That will be all the better. You will not have far to go when the séance is over."

He hesitated, posing in the big open hall, for the benefit of all who passed.

"I have several guests to-night, and must go up to arrange for their reception," he said. "Perhaps you will give me a little time before coming to my apartment. There is an excellent lounge upstairs."

"How shall we know when your entertainment begins?" asked Metcalfe.

"You will be called," Voldane replied. "My guests usually receive timely intimation of my desires. Go to the lounge, dear boy. I will see both you and your friend are not left out of the evening's observances."

Voldane strode theatrically to the big

staircase and mounted it step by step and very slowly, still posing for all to see who were passing in and out of the hotel.

I strolled with Metcalfe toward the lounge, following Voldane up the flight of steps.

"Observances," snorted Metcalfe. "He talks as if he were going to demonstrate the miraculous."

"The unwholesome fakir," I replied, all my prejudices bristling within me. "I'd like to demonstrate to him the virtues of soap and water, clean shaving, regular haircutting, and hard exercise in the open air."

"He is keen," Metcalf said thoughtfully. "Note how quickly he picked us out when we followed him in the streets."

"Yes. He suggests the guilty conscience," I replied. "I think the matter is as simple as I thought this afternoon. Arrest Voldane, and you have probably the thief who stole the Bremberg pearls."

"You are much too headlong in your reasoning," Metcalfe said quietly. "At the moment, we have not a shadow of proof—not a fact against him likely to influence a policeman or a magistrate. His keen eye for followers might be due to one of a hundred reasons. He might be mad, for instance."

"I don't think the creature is mad," I said stoutly. "I think he is just an unclean, vicious fakir and humbug."

Metcalfe shrugged his shoulders.

"After all, you have but little evidence on which to base such a hasty judgment."

We were back in the great lounge again, now still more crowded, for some of the Leicester men about town had come to meet the assembly of players of the week.

I found myself talking freely with many people, to whom Metcalfe introduced me, and finally, with my friend and colleague, we brought up in the group surrounding the beautiful young actress we knew as Ella, the Trance Girl.

We had no difficulty in becoming one of this animated little party. Without being formally introduced, we were soon of it and taking part in the conversation. Ella, in her beautiful gown, was the point of interest. She was talking rapidly and well, her eyes glowing, a soft flush suffusing her oval cheeks. She was retailing some of the adventures of the Voldane Company in a tour of one-night stands in America. Two things surprised me about her social pose. She always spoke well of Voldane, with the enthusiasm of a devotee for a master or a priest of the inner temple. Her assured poise, the crisp, correct delivery of her words, her steady, vibrant voice, and the authoritative manner in which she held her audience, and was bent on interesting them, made the suspicion I had formed that she took drugs almost an idle one. Her confident manner was not the result of unwise stimulation of the nerve centers. It was due to sheer health and animal spirits, the desire to please, and the consciousness of nerves under superb control.

We were chatting there idly enough. Ella held the stage, and was relating with great zest the circumstances of a visit the Voldane Company had paid to a mining camp in the Far West. She was all aglow with the excitement of holding her little audience, and obviously enjoying the impression she was creating.

Just as the story was reaching its most critical point, and the flow of Ella's narrative was at the height of its charm, a chiming clock in the big room softly indicated the passing of the half hour.

Ella suddenly stood up, one hand resting upon her heart. Her narrative stopped in the middle of a sentence. It ceased as suddenly as a flow of water

stops when the tap is turned against it. If the story could be described as a cord streaming from Ella to her hearers, one can best indicate how abruptly the girl ceased to talk by imagining the cord being cut in two at a moment's notice.

Ella stood, suddenly pale. There was the same look in her eyes I had seen during the morning in the train. The blood left her glowing cheeks. Some of the nerves about her sensitive mouth began to twitch ominously.

"Ah!" Ella said, taking no notice of her companions, and the abruptly broken story having evidently no part in her thoughts; "the master calls."

She shivered slightly, and then, without a word of excuse or leavetaking, she swept across the room and left by the folding doors.

"Now, that's a queer stunt," said a young actor, at my elbow. "Not so much as a polite 'Well, I must be going' about it. She's just off—off to the master."

"The Voldane lot are all touched with the Voldane humbug," a pretty little music-hall soubrette said maliciously. "They never get the paint off. They wear their make-up in the streets."

"A nasty habit," said a stout, jovial artist.

"Voldane is full of nasty habits," said the soubrette still more maliciously. "And some of his habits are contagious. Most of his people are queer. I've met them several times."

I had no time to follow the conversation Ella's action had prompted among her friends.

Metcalfe suddenly touched my arm. A man in a somewhat gorgeous uniform was standing at his elbow.

"Voldane has called us," whispered Metcalfe.

Together we set out for the big drawing-room which Voldane and his servants had turned into a saloon.

It was indeed a strange scene to which we were introduced. The room had been completely transformed. Its walls and the conventional decorations had been draped with heavy black velvet curtains, which hung from ceiling to floor. The lighting had been altered, and the place was suffused with concealed lights, which blazed away in bronze metal-work fittings of artistic shape. The hotel furniture and carpets had been incontinently bundled out. The wooden floor was polished and strewn with heavy Persian carpets. Here and there were gilded chairs and elegant settees. At the head of the room and far from the door was a slightly raised platform; and on it was a solitary chair draped with a gorgeous tiger's skin. About the dais were other rare fur rugs, which gave a touch of the exotic to the somber splendor of the carefully arranged room.

As we entered, several people were already in the room. Who they were, why they were drawn there, I never knew, for I did not meet any of them again. There was an elderly, prosperous-looking man with two well-dressed girls; a group of four young men obviously represented the newspaper interests; there were three passé ladies in black silk; a proud young husband and his wife, and others who did not hold my attention or imprint themselves on my memory. They were standing about, rather awkwardly talking in whispers, impressed by their surroundings. I could hear zither music afar off, which again seemed to add a drug to the strange atmosphere of the saloon. Then, almost as soon as we had entered, a gong was sounded, and it had barely ceased to reverberate before Voldane stepped through the velvet curtains and stood before us—an impressive figure in a clinging robe of velvet, and upon his head the vivid red fez.

Of Voldane's entertainment I need say little here. It really was mysterious to a point where it baffled comprehension or explanation. The séance

was a mixture of hypnotic phenomena, mere mystery mongering of the music-hall type, the manifestations dealt in by spiritualists, and the kind of illusion with which travelers in India are most familiar.

Ella had a share in this strange melange.

She came into a strong light, in a clinging white dress. She manifested no signs of physical distress, and took a part in a mysterious illusion with evident gayety, charm, and high spirits.

In the room with its deep shadows and cunning lights, Voldane, in his black velvet gown, his red headgear, and his brown face and black mustache, the only points of color which marked him out from his gloomy background, professed to make Ella achieve the miraculous.

Certainly what the girl accomplished was more than I could explain. She walked on air. Then she lay back about the height of Voldane's waist and moved in space as if she were floating on water surging underneath her in billows. Once, quite passively, she stood still for some seconds and then ascended, apparently without mechanical aid, until her head touched the ceiling. Voldane himself, making strange passes, sat some six feet from the girl on the chair isolated on the dais. Her last manifestation was to stand, seemingly in the center of the room, in an attitude of farewell. Voldane bowed to her. "Good night, pretty one," he said, with a wave of his hand. She stood there one moment smiling at him and at us. The next moment she was gone. She did not move. She was in one place one moment and the next moment she had vanished. And two seconds later she walked in through the door we had entered, at the other end of the room, and mingled with the company as a guest.

Metcalfe attached himself to Ella for the rest of the evening. The séance was at an end. Voldane, the great one, still wearing his black robes, unbent among his guests. There was supper—a light Bohemian meal, exquisitely served, with dainty foods and very choice wines. Afterward there was music and a dance—a ballet performed by six girls.

Metcalfe seemed to be enjoying the evening. He sat mostly with Ella, talking gayly and evidently making a favorable impression on Voldane's beautiful assistant.

About one o'clock in the morning the guests began to go. Voldane showed signs of flagging interest. And as the clock struck the hour, Ella, who had sat on a settee, talking to Metcalfe, suddenly changed her manner.

I heard the faint sound of music—zither music—from an inner room. I saw Ella's eyes glaze, her form stiffen, her face pale, and the nerves about her full lips begin to work convulsively, as they had done in the train.

With an abruptness which had startled her friends in the saloon, she suddenly stood erect.

"My call," she said. "Influences are calling which must be obeyed."

Without a glance at us, she walked across the room and disappeared behind Voldane's funeral trappings.

We stood alone in the now deserted room—Voldane, Metcalfe, and myself.

Voldane was still urbane, but we had obviously come to a point beyond which we would be outstaying our welcome.

"I am glad you have enjoyed the evening," Voldane said, thrusting out his hand significantly. "We have been traveling all day, and are very tired. You must come again. I have much I can show you—greater marvels than you have yet seen."

He almost thrust us out of the room as he spoke, shaking hands with us cordially all the time. So strong were his hands and so intense was the grip that five minutes after I noted the impres-

sion of a heavy chased ring he wore on the soft part of one of my fingers.

As I said "Good night" to him, I caught a glimpse of the mystery man, standing waving his hand, in the center of the strangely lighted room and smiling a patronizing farewell.

We were back in our own sitting room. I was mixing myself a night-cap. Metcalfe, with a thoughtful air, was lighting a cigar.

"Well, that's a queer start," I said, for want of something better to bridge the silence.

"I know a still queerer start," Metcalfe replied, grinning like a schoolboy.

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket a moment, and then brought out something which caught and reflected the light.

Gently laid on the table, it turned out to be a necklace of exquisite pearls. Perfectly matched, the gems glowed with all the gentle radiance of pearls when exposed to artificial light. I passed under the spell of their chaste beauty at once.

"Why, what a set of beauties!" I exclaimed, gasping, as I gazed on them. "Whose are they?"

"I am rather inclined to think they belong to Lady Bremberg," Metcalfe said, smiling grimly.

"Where did you find them, Metcalfe?" I asked, astounded by his reply.

"Ella, the trance girl, was wearing them," Metcalfe answered.

"You took them from her?" I gasped.

"No. She placed them in my hands," Metcalfe answered.

"When?"

"Just before she left the room for the last time," Metcalfe replied coolly. "You remember—she did not seem herself."

"You mean, when the zither began to play?" I suggested.

"Yes," replied Metcalfe. "I distinctly remember the zither began to play at the moment the girl, Ella, seemed to lose her self-control."

"And shall you hold or return them?" I asked curiously.

"I don't know," said Metcalfe, pulling thoughtfully on his cigar.

CHAPTER X.

"EVERY QUESTION——"

THE next morning we held an inquest on Lady Bremberg's pearl necklace. The problem was whether to give the jewels up to Ella, Voldane's assistant, and make light of the matter, trusting to the restoration to establish a greater intimacy between us and Voldane, or to remain silent and maintain an attitude that ignored any knowledge of the pearls whatever.

"In the first place," Metcalfe argued, "the possession of the pearls by the girl Ella proves nothing. Voldane may not even be aware of the existence of the jewels. Again, the girl can easily have come into innocent possession of Lady Bremberg's necklace. It may have been given to her by the thief—whoever he may turn out to be. She may have no knowledge that the jewelry she handed to me forms the proceeds of a daring robbery."

"Against that, you have the strange circumstances under which she handed the jewels to you," I suggested.

Metcalfe nodded appreciatively.

"Quite true," he replied. "I have thought of that aspect of the situation. I have a theory which might fit it. I believe, from the girl's manner earlier in the evening at ten-thirty in the lounge, and on the train yesterday afternoon, her mind passed under hypnotic influence at the moment she handed the necklace to me. In that case, she might not know quite what she was doing. The action might have been an automatic one, which she had been bound to perform—under the hypnotic call. I can only explain it as being the right

action under the wrong circumstances —circumstances which the hypnotist rather than the subject or the experiment should have controlled. In that case, the charming girl, Ella, would not know she had handed the jewelry to me."

"And what do you propose to do?" I asked.

"Hold the necklace for the time being, and keep the matter a secret," he replied readily. "In this affair I rely on you not to speak a word of the incident."

"Of course," I agreed readily enough.

"I don't believe the girl is guilty," Metcalfe said, with sudden warmth.

I smiled, for there was more than professional interest and conviction expressed on his handsome face.

"Don't be a fool," he added irritably. "You think I have more than a detective's feeling toward Ella? Well, what if I have? She is a charming, highly cultivated girl. It beats me to think she should be mixed up on intimate terms with a creature like Voldane. But then vanity and ambition account for many strange things women do on the stage.

"I figure it out this way," Metcalfe went on slowly. "If Voldane is interested in this necklace, the loss will hit him hard. He dare not make a fuss, advertise, or in any way publish his loss, but he'll raise Cain to get his hands on the pearls again. Apart from their value, there is the damaging fact that they have been in his possession—if he is really the thief. Voldane cannot be comfortable in his mind if they are out of his hands. On the other hand, if Ella is a party to the theft, whoever is the actual thief will act for her in attempting a secret recovery. If she were merely in innocent possession of the jewelry, she will make the matter public in the ordinary way, and pursue the inquiry herself. Whichever action they choose to take—Voldane, Ella, or, if Voldane is not the thief, one other person we do not yet know—we shall get a clear lead as to the next steps to be taken in our inquiry. Meanwhile, I have deposited the jewels where no one can possibly find them, and since I am the only possessor of the secret, all inquiries leading the thief to a knowledge of their whereabouts must come to me."

"And what do you purpose doing today?" I asked curiously.

"I think I shall lounge about Leicester and see how this week's theatrical folk employ their leisure," he replied. "If I do not run across you during the day, I shall be at the music hall tonight."

He stopped, and smiled grimly at me from the door.

"If the cocksure detective, Blackstone, gets a line on the pearls, it will chill him to the marrow to find he has to come to me."

He laughed heartily at the thought, as he strode out of the room.

Voldane was playing when I entered the Scala Music Hall, Leicester, that night. I had been alone most of the day, and was glad to run across Metcalfe, whom I found languidly watching the show from the back of the darkened dress circle. I took my stand by his side, and, as the place was crowded and many people were drifting about the promenade, neither of us spoke about the errand which had brought us to Leicester.

I do not know whether it is necessary to describe Voldane's act in detail. It was certainly one of the most elaborate and impressive acts ever staged as a separate item in a music-hall program. It was a hotch-potch of scenery, vivid lighting, piquant dresses, pretty girls, songs and dances, ballet interludes, and tableaux. The whole noisy, ever-changing stage business served as a setting for the peculiar talents of Voldane himself.

Amid song and dance, ballet, dia-

logue, acrobatic display, and the movements of a well-gowned chorus, Voldane's personality ran like a black thread. In one part, he would appear as a tramp conjuror and give an exhibition of really clever sleight-of-hand and card tricks. Another moment he would be his mysterious self, conducting a mesmeric show of the old type, assisted by four professional mediums, who, under his direction, lent themselves to all sorts of side-splitting buffoonery. The pretty girl we had seen traveling with his party, on the Sunday, took part in a thought-reading interlude, and she was also the center of a series of wonderful illusions, very much on the lines of the disappearing act Voldane had played before us at the private séance the night before. Olga, the name Voldane used, in introducing his partner, seemed to walk, float, and disappear into space. Reason told the sensible people in the audience that the things they were looking upon could not happen, but Voldane's strong suit was that they seemed to happen, and reason did not supply the mechanical explanation of the phenomena. The whole act was performed in an elaborate setting of changing scenes, sometimes vividly lighted, at other times cunningly darkened. As one exciting interlude led to something still more extravagant, the whole audience passed from the spell-bound state to a degree of enthusiasm that was almost hysterical.

As I lounged with Metcalfe, I was puzzled to make out just where Ella fitted into the entertainment, but, with the end of Voldane's turn, I began to see the part she played before the public and how she had earned her name.

The Great Voldane concluded with what he called his "Great Trance Act." Voldane seemed very fond of the word "Great." The trance game he worked was one with which many theater-goers are familiar. Under Voldane's treatment, it became a creepy business.

He concluded on a stage draped entirely with black velvet curtains. In this scene a coffin was introduced and displayed on a substantial table. Voldane, in the now familiar velvet robes, making the most of his long, wild hair, piercing eyes, brown complexion, and black mustache, struck an attitude. There was a flash of stage lightning and an old man, with a long, white beard, made up and dressed like an Indian magic man, crept on to the stage, squatted at Voldane's feet, and began to play the music of incantation on the zither. Despite his make-up and simulated senility, I recognized the performer as the ugly old man who had played the instrument in the railway train. The music was full of the same weird strains. Again I noticed it slowed down or stupefied the senses as opium does. The huge audience changed its mood, and, from an attitude of noisy appreciative enthusiasm, became silent, almost moody.

Voldane waved a wand, and again the stage lightning flashed.

At that moment, Ella, a vision of beauty, clad in filmy white suggesting night attire, stepped through the black curtains and stood like a statue bathed in the fierce spotlight.

I heard Metcalfe catch his breath, and I am sure that her beauty strangely moved him. I know I was not insensible to it. Beautiful, indeed, was Ella, a lissom, youthful creature in white, with her tawny hair in coils and glistening in the light, and her eyes smiling appreciation of the sudden noisy welcome of the audience which her charm alone compelled. A vision on which the eye rested, she stood gratefully until the applause had ended, and then walked slowly to Voldane, who dictated her movements with a gesture of command. Then followed the usual stagy business.

"You are quite ready for the long sleep, mademoiselle?" Voldane asked

impressively, as he theatrically patted her coiled hair with his long, snakelike fingers.

"Why, yes, master," the girl answered, with studied simplicity.

"You know what I am going to do?" Voldane asked, so that he could explain his purpose to the crowd in his answer.

Ella smiled and nodded noncommittally.

"I am going to exercise my strange gift of hypnotism. I shall place you in that couch"—he pointed to the coffin outlined by the spotlight; "I shall bid you sleep, deeper and deeper; you will fall into a light slumber, and then sink into a trance. You will sleep on without wakening, unconscious of anything, and as one dead, until I call you."

Ella bent her head to signify she understood.

"I shall call you back to life precisely at the hour of ten, on Friday evening next," Voldane concluded.

I saw Metcalfe shrug his shoulders impatiently, and there was a derisive smile on his face as he glanced at me. We knew we were being humbugged. But the audience seemed to accept the statement, and was further impressed by the way it was carried into effect. I must confess I felt my gorge rise as I saw the beautiful girl take part in such a morbid piece of claptrap stage business, and I am sure Metcalfe could hardly restrain his anger. We watched Ella ascend to the couch in the elaborately upholstered coffin. She climbed to the appointed resting place and gracefully ensconced herself amid the lavish silken upholstery. She sat upright, looking singularly flowerlike; the spotlight beating upon her and the sinister head and shoulders of Voldane, which were to be seen from behind the coffin. The zither began to play with a tremulous intensity—a slight moaning accompaniment coming from several of the instruments in the orchestra.

At that moment, Voldane bent over the coffin and fixed the girl's eyes, which shone like twin stars, with his own strangely uncanny glance.

"I say 'sleep, mademoiselle,' " he said, in a hoarse, stagy whisper, and making mysterious passes with his hand. "I, the Great Voldane, bid you sleep—sleep—sleep—sleep until I awaken you and call you from your trance."

At the repetition of the word "sleep," Ella gently drooped backward, until she lay with her head pillowed and turned toward the audience. The pillows were so arranged that her beautiful oval face never sank out of sight below the rim of the coffin side. As she sank to rest, Voldane struck a stage attitude, and that was the last tableau—Voldane leering triumphantly at his audience and the recumbent girl; Ella, with closed eyes, apparently sleeping peacefully, and the Indian fakir crouching on the ground and playing the music which lent such a mystic atmosphere to the spectacle.

With the tableau a curtain dropped, and Voldane, apparently in the last throes of exhaustion, answered the thunderous applause of his audience.

He made a brief speech in which he passed his word of honor that Ella would remain asleep until the Friday night, when she would be publicly awakened on the stage, before the audience, at ten o'clock. In the meantime, she would not leave the theater. She would be fed and attended to by a trained nurse. She would be unconscious of sound and sensation, as Voldane himself would demonstrate night by night at successive performances. He invited medical men or any self-appointed committees of inspection to present themselves at the theater, at any hour during the day or night, to test the truth of his statements. He concluded by claiming that he was prepared to forfeit one thousand pounds if any one could prove that the girl did not sleep through the promised period,

or that any agency was used to cause her to do so, save his own hypnotic power.

With that robust theatrical statement, the curtain descended on the last act of Voldane's contribution to the evening's entertainment amid a furore of applause. Voldane's trance act had well begun its weekly work. Ella, in her trance, meant a growing local interest in Voldane's show, night by night, during practically the whole period of his visit.

The whole thing, its tawdry staginess and theatricality, though it impressed me, disgusted by its palpable insincerity. I think Metcalfe was depressed, too. He was moody and silent as we walked back to the hotel.

We sat in the lounge for some time before separating, and neither of us was inclined to talk much. I felt that Metcalfe, who had evidently been impressed by Ella's personal charm, was bitterly annoyed to find the girl taking a public part in such a piece of cheap foolery.

Then suddenly his eyes brightened.

"You asked yesterday why this series of burglaries always takes place on Friday nights," he said.

"Yes," I answered. "You said, in crime every question ought to have an answer. Have you found an answer to mine?"

"Yes," replied Metcalfe, looking at me intently. "There is an answer and a plausible one. Until ten o'clock on Friday, this trance act means that three principals are on the stage together and cannot leave the theater. Probably, the maintenance of the trance deception keeps Voldane at the theater until the whole place is clear—until, perhaps, eleven o'clock at night."

I saw the force of his suggestion.

"You narrow the issue down," I said pointedly.

"Yes, the robberies may have been committed by one of three people," he agreed. "Voldane is suspect, of course. Ella is under suspicion, but I cannot associate such a frank and charming girl with crime. And there is the old reprobate who plays the zither. I must look into his method of spending his leisure at once."

"And you think the trance is just a cunning piece of deception?" I suggested.

"Certainly," he replied. "Don't you?"

I was in entire agreement about that, and said so.

"But Ella must be at the theater night and day for show purposes," I said.

Metcalfe nodded gloomily.

"That is what I do not like about Voldane's act," he said quietly. "Ella is the only person in the company who is not free to leave the theater from Monday until Friday night. That fact may, or may not, be significant."

Metcalfe, pacing the room irritably, was in a very thoughtful mood, until we separated for the night.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

THAT night, the first of a startling series of adventures happened in our suite of rooms in the Leicester Hotel.

Metcalfe had lingered with me in our sitting room, where he had been unusually silent. Together we consumed numerous cigarettes, maintaining a dull and taciturn conversation as we did so.

About twelve I rose to pour myself out a whisky and soda by way of a nightcap.

"Will you join me?" I asked, turning to Metcalfe.

"No," he said, quietly rising from his chair. "I have a long day to-morrow, and one or two problems on my mind. I think I will get between the sheets and sleep on the latter and be ready for the former."

He suited the action to the word by

swinging out of the room, and leaving me in possession of our sitting room. I lingered there a long time. A man never quite happy in a strange, dull hotel, I postponed the hour of retirement until I felt sleepy. But, as often happens, the later the hour grew the less inclined for sleep did I feel.

The clock had struck one when I decided to go to my room and woo sleep, since the solacing goddess would not meet me halfway.

I lay in bed restless, irritable, and wakeful. Indeed, I must have read three or four chapters of a novel I had brought along with me. Soon I found myself nodding and yawning. Then I must have fallen asleep for a few minutes, to be awakened by my book falling on the floor. I decided the time had come to seek oblivion. Before switching off the light, I looked at my watch. The fingers indicated half past two. When I lay in the silence, the whole hotel seemed to be asleep. There was scarcely a sound to be heard about the great building, and what sounds did reach me from within and without the hotel seemed to be magnified in a most uncanny manner.

Everything appeared to be exaggerated as I lay in the darkness. I could hear occasional remote sounds as if they were occurring in the basement of the hotel. I could hear my watch ticking under my pillow. Now and again some trivial creaking noise in the corridor sounded to my excited fancy like the explosion of a gun. I even lay abed listening to a strange thumping sound, which at first seemed a mystery. When at last I solved the problem, the strange noise turned out to be the pulsation of my own heart.

And yet there were strange sounds in the air. I heard something heavy fall —a dull thud. The noise seemed nearer to me. I found myself wondering whether it came from Metcalfe's room. We had now a suite of three rooms all together—two bedrooms with a sitting room in between them. Both the bedrooms and the sitting room had doors leading to the corridor, but one could get from my bedroom into the sitting room and out of the sitting room into Metcalfe's bedroom without leaving any of the rooms or using the corridor doors. As I lay, excitedly listening, magnifying all the occasional noises that broke into the stark silence about me, my nerves on edge at the prospect of a night of insomnia, I heard more sounds and came to the conclusion they were made in Metcalfe's room. Poor old Metcalfe was restless, too, I thought, and tried to settle again, though I had a whimsical desire to don my dressing gown, seek his room, and smoke a pipe of tobacco with him, to relieve the solitude of the small hours. This I most certainly should have done, but that I knew Metcalfe in many of his moods, and was not sure whether he would welcome a visitor so late at night, in view of his expressed desire to obtain a good night's rest.

I think I must have fallen asleep at last, or certainly I had reached the borderland where consciousness slowly merges into sleep. I found myself listening, as I thought, to strange music. The haunting melody made by the man who traveled with Voldane was in my ears. I could hear the music of the zither as I suddenly swung out of a sleep, that might only have lasted a few seconds, to complete consciousness.

Once I awoke, I knew the zither music was but a dream. There was nothing but the tense silence of the hotel, which I had already found so oppressive. I sat up in bed listening, partly to make sure I had not heard the zither music. Was it fancy that made me think I heard a soft footfall from the corridor outside? And, if it were not fancy, what did a footfall count during the night in a big hotel? Probably some late guest was returning

to his room. Or maybe one of the attendants was going his stated rounds along the vast corridors, bent on his task of protecting the guests asleep in the hotel.

Then, quite distinctly and clearly, I heard a most appalling noise.

It was a moaning sound. Beginning like a masculine cry for help, the call tailed off into a sort of strangled scream. The noise made me think of some one calling and being smothered as he made the effort. I had barely decided on the nature of the sound, when it was repeated, this time with more vigor. The moan came first. A scream seemed to form the tail end of the sound. And the strange call ended breathlessly, as if the noise had been smothered as it left some one's lips.

I was out of bed and in my dressing gown in an instant. I switched on the light and ran into the sitting room. Again I turned on the light, and, as I did so, the strange, uncanny sound was repeated for the third time. And now there was no mistaking its source. It came across the sitting room, a labored cry for help, from the room Metcalfe was occupying. In a second I was through the door and standing by my friend's bedside, after first flooding the room with electric light.

I found the room in a state of wild disorder. Metcalfe lay on the bed. A stream of blood ran in a smear across his temple. A patch of red had darkened the white pillow and the counterpane. Metcalfe's face showed a ghastly yellow in the strong light. He had been effectively gagged by a man who was quite a master of the art, for a neat lump of wadding had been jammed between the teeth, and the whole had been tightly fixed in its place by surgical bandages. I could smell the sickly odor of chloroform as I approached the bed. As I turned on the light, my mind received the impression that the room had been entered and hurriedly searched. Not a thing seemed in its place, and the floor was littered with papers, the contents of a portmanteau, boots, and ornaments. Wardrobe and chest of drawers were wide open, and their contents, too, had been flung upon the floor. On the carpet lay a pocket flash light, which looked as if it had been discarded in the headlong flight of the marauders.

All this I noted in a flash as I entered the room. My first care was for Metcalfe. As quickly as I could, I tore away the bandages and the gag and several ropes which bound him, hand and feet, to the iron bedstead. As I worked, I noticed the wound from which the blood had flown. It was high up above the temple and among Metcalfe's close-cropped hair—evidently the result of a blow from a club or a short loaded stick.

As I freed Metcalfe from the gag, which had not only silenced but had half smothered him, he shook himself like a terrier.

"Thanks, old man," he said, in a husky whisper, and then promptly collapsed into a dead faint.

It took me some minutes to restore my friend. But a gulp of spirits soon brought Metcalfe back to life again, and I had him propped up in bed, the healthy color slowly coming back once more to his yellow cheeks. Indeed, in a few minutes he had lighted a cigarette, and, blowing rings toward the ceiling, preferred to make light of his adventure and only to see the amazing side of it.

Quite clearly he told me what had occurred.

"I had been asleep, I think," he explained, in answering my request for information. "When I got to bed I kept the light on and read for a few minutes. Afterward, I switched off the light and almost immediately fell asleep. I cannot tell you how long I had been asleep, but, as you know, I am easily awakened, for I lie like a dog with one

ear open. I awoke suddenly, and a sense that has helped me in many a tight corner told me that, though the room was in darkness, I was no longer alone."

"What actually happened?" I asked curiously.

"That I cannot tell you," he replied. "The room was in pitch darkness when I awoke with an eerie feeling that I was not alone. I stirred in bed, intending to get quietly on my legs. For a second I saw a stream of light come from the direction of the door. It must have fallen on me, as I was rising. I could not see any one, and I had no time to pursue my investigations. Some one delivered a blow which made me feel as if the end of the world had come. After that I know nothing of what took place until you switched on the light again. I just faded out of the picture and was coming to consciousness, dreaming that I had been counted out in a boxing match, when you entered the room. Indeed, I must have been half conscious, for I had torn at the gag and loosened it."

"And were either instinctively crying for help or groaning," I added.

There we sat in the early morning hours staring blankly at each other, and both our minds worked on the probabilities of the situation.

"That hound, Voldane," I said, after a long pause.

Metcalfe, who had cleared away the signs of the combat, and now looked himself, sat on the side of the bed and grinned.

"Always the same, dear boy," he said, rallying me, almost gayly, considering the rough usage he had experienced. "How do you get Voldane this time—reason, proof, or by just your old headlong gift for intuition?"

"Intuition," I said sulkily. "The thing looks like Voldane—Voldane out after his lost pearls."

"Because it pleases your sense of the dramatic to say so," Metcalfe answered with a grin.

"Well, how do you account for the nasty jar you received?"

Metcalfe's fine face suddenly became thoughtful.

"There are several possibilities," he replied, "and we can only consider them all, since we have no proof. First, I may have been the victim of a common hotel thief. Some one may have thought I am a Leicester magnate, teeming with bullion and worth a speculative visit."

"Yes," I answered grudgingly. "Possible, but unlikely."

"Such things do happen, and quite often enough are likely," Metcalfe responded. "Or again, Voldane may really be the thief, and have come out for the pearls, taking all risks. Last, and this is the probable theory and goes no further than the facts, some member of Voldane's company, other than Voldane himself, may have moved in the matter. I am bound to add that he moved very strenuously, if unsuccessfully, for his purpose," Metcalfe concluded with a rueful grin.

"And what do you propose to do?" I asked.

Metcalfe smiled cheerfully.

"Call the night clerk, summon the police, and make the usual fuss," he replied.

"Good Lord!" I ejaculated. "What in the name of Heaven is the good of all that?"

"Oh!" replied Metcalfe easily, "just to prove that we accept the incident at its face value—think I have been the victim of a wanton outrage, and suspect no one in particular."

He strode across the room and opened the door leading to the corridor. His fingers were on the push button, but he did not press it. Indeed, we both stood, almost motionless. A strange sound reached us simultaneously—the mysterious sensuous music

of the zither. The notes came very subdued, came stealing along the corridor. They seemed to form themselves into a silvern plaintive call.

"That beats me," Metcalfe said, looking into my eyes and apparently reading my thoughts.

"Yes. The great Voldane and his associates are on deck," I answered. "If you find the thief, I shall be right. You will take Voldane."

The zither quietly continued to send its plaintive melody stealing along the corridor.

We stood eying each other, too puzzled to speak. Then Metcalfe started as if he had suddenly been stung.

"Look!" he almost shouted. "Look there!"

He pointed with his forefinger to the floor in the direction of the door.

I had just time to see something moving at a startling speed across the carpet, like a piece of writhing whipcord.

"Great snakes," I said, in an awed whisper, as the thing disappeared through the door.

"One snake," Metcalfe said coolly. "One tiny snake. One of Voldane's pair of writhing charmers—one of the two we saw him playing with in the train. Don't bolt out into the corridor yet. Officially we have not seen Voldane's little pet."

Ten minutes later we called up the hotel servants, and it was nearly daylight before we had finished explaining, explaining, and explaining to the startled staff and a swarm of police officers of ascending rank.

When we were alone, Metcalfe, now fully dressed, threw himself into an easy-chair.

"There isn't much of the night left," he said, lighting the inevitable cigarette. "What do you say to an early breakfast?"

I agreed.

Ten minutes later, after a long ruminative silence, Metcalfe spoke again.

"Speaking of snakes," he said, with a smile, "I think your intuition is right, Colville."

"In guessing Voldane is the criminal?" I suggested.

"Yes," he agreed quietly. "Even without evidence, I think Voldane is our quarry."

"There is Ella," I said pointedly.

Metcalfe's face suddenly became grim and hard, but he took no notice of my interruption.

To be continued in the next issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, out next Tuesday, on April 30th. Do not lose sight of the fact that, as the magazine comes out once every week, you will not have long to wait for further chapters of this intensely interesting serial.

REVOLVER BORROWED AND RETURNED AFTER HOLDUP

THE holdup of ten people in J. E. Royer's grocery store, at No. 859 Rondo Street,, Minneapolis, Minn., was perpetrated with a borrowed revolver, the police declared. Joe Fleekes, of No. 389 Rice Street, one of the men held in connection with the robbery, is alleged to have taken the gun from the room of Oscar Mattacks, of No. 181 East Fourteenth Street, returning it after the holdup. Mattacks did not know it had been touched until Detectives James Quarles and James Mitchell went to his house to verify Fleekes' story, and proved to him the shells had been fired in his gun. Three dozen keys found in the pocket of Walter Barnes, the other person held in connection with the robbery, caused the police to hold the men pending investigation.

The Man from Yap

by Arthur P. Hankins

Author of "The Hunchback of Terrebonne," "The Torn Picture," "Criteria of Environment," etc.

FOREWORD.

Israel Pocket, retired from the San Francisco police force, is employed by the curator of the Milton Memorial Museum as watchman over the museum's treasured relics. In order to further facilitate the security of the exhibits, he is secreted inside a gigantic whale in the Natural Science Room, and is accordingly known as Jonah to his associates in the museum. There are peepholes in the whale's eyes and in its tail. A speaking tube connects Jonah with the office. Visitors at the museum, as they meander thoughtfully from exhibit to exhibit, have no knowledge of the unseen eyes which watch their every move. The queer things that Jonah witnesses in connection with the mysterious old antiques have furnished him with a store of reminiscences, which are set forth in the series of narratives, of which this is the fourth.

MISS MOLLY KELSO, matron of the museum, wrote the following limerick when she and I had looked up the Island of Yap in the atlas.

"To point out my country's a snap,"
Bragged the man from the wee isle of Yap.
With a touch of his pen,
He said "Presto!"—and then
His island vamosed from the map!

I don't know how the typefounders can make small enough dots to put Yap on the map. Yap is so small I'd think the Pacific Ocean would soak clear through it, and carry the mud away on the ebb tide.

Before the man from Yap was brought to my attention I always thought the yaps came from New York City, but they don't. The real Yaps come from a Pacific coral island ten miles long, where they fish, and eat yams and breadfruit and all such Robinson Crusoe forage, and chew betel nuts, and trade copra for mouth organs and mirrors, and ride in long canoes, and go naked. They're a mixed race, as near as I can learn—Malay, Jap, Micronesian, and Papuan stock; but they look like Chinamen to me.

Say, if I'd stayed in that museum a thousand years I'd never learned anything about science. That big-word stuff shoots off me like water off a duck. Old P. D. Labranza, the curator, could pick up a skull and tell at a glance whether the former owner of the thing was a hot-headed Democrat, a Hottentot, or a hot-dog man. But, with me, there are just four branches of the hu-

man race—white folks, colored folks, Dutchmen, and chinks. Any man that comes from beyond California's three-mile limit in the Pacific Ocean is a Chinaman. You can talk to me till we're both black in the face about Polynesians, Micronesians, Papuans, Japs, Filipinos, Samoans, or Siamese—they all look alike to me, and I think they're Chinamen.

This little scientific idiosyncracy of mine led me into trouble when I tangled up with the man from Yap.

One day a great lecturer, Doctor Hiram Emanuel Purdy, A. A. A. S., A. G. G. S., and sometimes W. and Y., pulled off a series of spiels in the Ethnological Room about the Pelew Islands. He was a long-nosed old cassowary, musty with useless knowledge. Every old scientific gobbler who kept transient rooms for bats in his top story made pilgrimage to hear this ancient ichthyosaurus talk, and to see his load of junk.

Now I was reposing peacefully in the belly of my whale in the Natural Science Room. I couldn't see into the Ethnological Room, but it was close enough for me to hear the lecture. So I just lazed there, half asleep, and had a scientific education slipped to me while I waited.

This old Purdy pelican had with him a couple of natives from one of these islands—a Yap and a Yapess. The girl, he said, was the daughter of a heap-big Yap chief. The boy, as I understood the dope, had been a sort of village cut-up back home, and, like the stranger that went to the funeral, had come along just for the ride. But of course I didn't get to see these canaries because of the show being pulled off in another room. If I'd seen them then, there would be no story to tell.

Now, the Coin Room was just within my range of vision, and off of it was the Oriental Room. Right in the double entrance between these two rooms stood a big, carved ebony chest, with a million little inlaid mother-of-pearl doodabs all over it. And right beside it stood a big, round stone with a hole in the middle, which weighed over a ton. I'd always thought the thing was a kind of prehistoric grindstone, but that day I got the dope on it right.

All of a sudden this flamingo who was reviling the Yaps sings out:

"Why, gentlemen—as I live, there's a coin from Yap!"

Then here he came, crossing my range of vision, followed by all those devout old disciples; and in the door of the Coin Room he pounced down on that grindstone, and began making queer noises in his throat.

"Who would have thought it!" he says. "A coin of Yap. Who donated it? Let me see. Ah—Professor Staves! I might have known his enterprise alone could have made this possible. Gentlemen, I was not aware that a coin of Yap had ever left the island."

Well, I perked up. If that old grindstone, which weighed a ton or more, was a coin, it was no wonder the Yaps went naked. It would have kept the Yaperinos busy mending pockets if their men had lugged money like that from café to race track.

Then this old joker pulled off a chapter on the coinage system of the Island of Yap.

The main currency of the island, he said, consisted of these big bowlders. Some of them weighed five tons, and were often fourteen or fifteen feet across. The Yaps got them on one of the Pelew Islands from limestone quarries.

A hog would cost a five-hundred-pound stone. A dog was worth six hundred. A wife was worth from five hundred pounds of rock to two tons, according to how classy she looked, or whether she could or couldn't mix yam cocktails to suit her dad.

The doc said folks usually kept their money in the back yard, and never worried about it. A pickpocket would have to use a derrick, a gang of ginnies, and a two-ton truck; and even the police might get on the scene before he'd got his gang lined up and hoisted the loot.

When a man sold something for one of these coins it often happened that he felt too lazy to take it home. So he just left it in the other fellow's yard, and paid no storage. It was his. He knew it, and so did the other fellow, and so did all the rest of the Yaps. Nobody could steal it. It was as safe there as in his own yard. So what was the use of moving it?

Once a rich Yap was moving a big coin on a raft from another island to his own home town, the doctor said. The raft capsized, and the mazuma went overboard. Did the millionaire wring his hands and cry "Ruined!" No—everything was all right. The coin was his, and everybody knew it. It was on the bottom of the Pacific, and everybody knew that. It was of just as much value there as anywhere else. Come on, boys—have a drink with me!

Well, that got my goat. And now I knew what that grindstone was doing in the entrance to the Coin Room. There wasn't room for it where it belonged, so old P. D. had put it in the entrance. Just like that ebony chest with the mother-of-pearl gilguys all over it. It belonged in the Oriental Room next door, but it was too crowded for it in there.

But wait till I tell you how that coin and the Chinese chest and me got tangled up, to the everlasting disgrace of the last-named member of the trio.

I think it was that same night that I strolled down to police headquarters after supper to chew the rag with any of my old pals that might be hanging around. There I met Wilcox and Townsend, two plain-clothes men, and they had a lot to tell about the big Chinese tong war that was then threatening to spread all over the State.

Wilcox and Townsend were both detailed on the job of capturing a bird known to the police records as Hipcroaker Slagle. They thought, when they got their hands on him, that they'd stop the big noise in Chinatown.

This flamingo was a bad actor. He'd been a beach comber on the China coast for years, spoke Chinese, and had a big pull with the Kim Len Sor gunmen. He was a dead shot, and aimed his automatic from his hip—which saved time, and usually brought down his man before that bird could get his own gun into action. So they called him Hipcroaker.

Hipcroaker, Wilcox said, was interested in a big Chinese lottery, had sneaked chinks into the United States right under the eyes of the immigration men, and smuggled opium right and left. But his worst stunt was heading the gun gang of the Kim Len Sor Tong. He seemed to put the breath of life into them, and to be the backbone of their courage. Wilcox wanted him bad, but he knew so many rat holes in Chinatown that they hadn't been able to land him.

The war was between the Bing Kongs and the Kim Len Sors, two old rival tongs, and it was over a slave girl. At least, that was the excuse for the outbreak, but the trouble dated back hundreds of years, across the sea.

I asked what this Hipcroaker Slagle looked like. Wilcox said he was a well-dressed young disciple that nobody would take to be the bad man he was.

They said, too, that Willie Wah Wong was the leader of the Bing Kongs, but that they couldn't get anything on him. Willie Wah Wong was a big, wealthy Chinaman who mixed lots with Americans. He claimed that, though he was the chief of the Bing Kong Tong, the feud had gone entirely out of his hands. He'd pleaded with his

gunmen, he said, with tears in his eyes; but they were sore about the swiping of their slave girl, and he couldn't keep the automatics from popping.

Now, I knew something of Willie Wah Wong by reason of my connection with the museum. I'd seen him lots of times when he was dedicating his big outfit of Chinese curios to the public. Half the Chinese stuff in the Oriental Room had been given to the museum by him, and he was strong with old P. D. Labranza. He was considered a big, influential business man of San Francisco by both Chinese and Americans, and I wondered if he really wasn't able to stop the killings if he wanted to. They're a mysterious people. When you're dealing with them you never know whether you're afoot or a-horseback.

A week later, I met Wilcox again, and asked him how his case was coming on.

"We haven't been able to catch Hipcroaker," he says, "nor to prove that Willie Wah Wong could stop it if he would. But we've got a new line to work on. There's a story in it, too.

"Day before yesterday we nabbed a Kim Len Sor gunman called Lum Been. He was in the act of shooting a Bing Kong man, and we got him dead to rights. He coughed up a lot when we gave him the third degree.

"He said that years ago, over in China—before hardly any of these fellows had come across—this Willie Wah Wong's father had been a money lender—a regular old mortgage collector, hated by everybody he dealt with.

"Well, he got a sort of chattel mortgage on the household property of an influential old family that was going down the line financially. The money lender was a Bing Kong man, and his victim was a Kim Len Sor.

"When the day of settlement came Willie Wah Wong's father wouldn't listen to the voice of reason, and cleaned out everything the other fellow had.

"Now, the old man dies, and Willie Wah Wong grows up and steps into his dad's shoes. He's rich, and comes to America, where he grows richer and gets to be the big man of the Bing Kong Tong.

"Then the fellow whose worldly goods Willie's father had lifted gets ready to croak; and on his deathbed he tells *his* son a secret which includes a method of avenging the family on the Wongs. This fellow's son is called Ah Sam.

"Well, it seems that among the valuables Willie Wah Wong's father took from Ah Sam's father was a big ebony chest, worth up in the thousands. In the bottom of it is a secret compartment. Of course Ah Sam's old man didn't tell Willie Wah Wong's dad anything about this, for he was naturally sore over losing his junk, and was not ripe for amiable conversation on secret compartments.

"So Ah Sam's dad tells the boy to follow Willie Wah Wong to America. Willie won't know him, because Ah Sam was a kid when Willie was in China. He tells him to get a job in Willie's household, if he can, and plan for his undoing.

"Ah Sam is to take his tong, the Kim Len Sors, into his confidence; and it will be a revenge on the Bing Kong Tong, their old enemies, as well as on the family that Willie Wah Wong belongs to. The old man tells Ah Sam of an expert in Chinese handwriting that he knows about, who will make of him an accomplished forger. In Willie's household, over in America, Ah Sam must get Willie's signature and practice till he can do it right. Then, over Willie's forged John Hancock, Ah Sam must write something which will prove Willie a traitor to the tong of which he is chief in America. This paper Ah Sam is to hide in the secret compart-

ment of the ebony chest which Willie got from Ah Sam's dad.

"When this is done, Ah Sam must start the whisper around that Willie isn't all he's cracked up to be. Finally there will be an investigation, the incriminating papers will be found in the secret compartment, and Willie will be shot at sunrise by members of his own tong. Thus will the ruination of Ah Sam's family be avenged, and the Bing Kongs be a disgrace in the eyes of their rivals.

"Well," Wilcox goes on, "this Bing Kong man that we got told us that Ah Sam had done as his dad ordered. He came here, learned to cook, and after several years got a job in Willie's kitchen. He fixed up the papers, found the secret spring which opened the compartment in the bottom of the chest, and slipped them in. He told his tong that everything was set for the big act, then he quit his job at Willie's.

"But the Kim Len Sors waited nearly a year after Ah Sam had left Willie's employ, so as to clear him of all suspicion of complicity in the plot. Then a tong war broke out, and Ah Sam was shot and instantly killed. He alone knew the combination of the secret compartment.

"And the slave-girl racket, this pelican said, is only a bluff so far as the Kim Len Sors are concerned—an excuse to get at Willie Wah Wong's property and rifle that chest. But Wong's house is guarded by twenty gunmen, so the war goes on."

Wilcox's yarn interested me, you can bet; but it interested me more when, a few days later, Wilcox told me the Kim Len Sors had cut the riffle, broken into Willie's house, and found there was no ebony chest such as Ah Sam had described.

So now they kept on fighting for the pure devilment of the thing, and the police were at their wits' end to calm them down.

Well, I've spilled the beans, haven't I? You've guessed that the chest had been given, among the other relics, to the museum by Willie Wah Wong, who knew nothing of the secret compartment or of the papers which meant his undoing if brought to light. And you've guessed more than that likely—that the chest stood beside the coin of Yap in the opening between the Coin Room and the Oriental Room.

The police wanted those papers. The Kim Len Sors wanted them. If the police got them, they could tell Willie Wah Wong about them, and threaten to expose him if he didn't stop the tong war. If the Kim Len Sors got them, it was good night for little Willie. And old Jonah alone knew where they were. I proved that I knew by looking over the Wong collection and making sure that no other ebony chest had been given by him to the museum.

So I sat in the belly of the whale next day, thinking the thing out. At the first opportunity I'd get at that chest and press every little mother-of-pearl gadget till I touched the secret spring. Then I'd flash the papers on Wilcox and Townsend and cover myself with glory.

Well, that was all simple enough; but suppose it took a combination of two or three or four of those little doodabs to work the thing? There were literally hundreds of them. A man might work the rest of his life and not get the right ones. Well, if the worst came to the worst, I'd tell old P. D. and see if he wouldn't consent to have the bottom ripped out.

So I pondered; and naturally, while so doing, I peeked through the whale's right eye at the chest. There, stealthily pressing knob after knob on the chest, was a slant-eyed yellow Chinaman.

I caught my breath. The Kim Len Sors had in some way learned of the Wong collection and sent an agent to

investigate; and here he was trying to beat me out of my medal.

He was a young fellow, dressed in good American clothes, and with close-cropped hair. The picturesque Chinaman is no more in San Francisco. He's quit baking pies for the Moon god; he's cut off his queue; he eats ham and eggs as often as he eats Sop Kum Chow Yuke. The only tradition he refuses to give up is his war with rival tongs, but he wages it with the latest pattern in automatic pistols.

Just what to do I didn't know, but I doubted, if Wilcox's information was correct, whether the fellow knew which gimcrack to touch. It was evident that he did not, the way his long, yellow fingers were traveling all over the chest.

I decided to watch this bird. He'd not find it the first day, I was willing to bet; and next morning I'd be prepared for him.

He was interrupted countless times by visitors to the museum, of course; but he pretended to be just looking about, and when the coast was clear he'd dive back to the chest and go to work again. He stuck it out all afternoon, and at closing time he walked slowly away, his face unreadable.

Ten minutes later, I had Wilcox on the phone.

It was eight o'clock when Wilcox and I left my house and walked to the museum. P. D. had given me a key and permission to spend the night there if I wanted to.

With the aid of Wilcox's flash light, we went at those mother-of-pearl adornments and played on them like a couple of pianists pulling off a duet. But it was no use—we couldn't open the compartment.

"It may be," I says to Wilkie, "that these tong men will find some disciple in their midst who knows more about Chinese secret compartments than we do. In that case, we'd better allow them to open it for us, and be on hand to nab the papers when they get them. You have a man or two in the office. Leave the rest to me."

Wilcox agreed.

Well, that was all fine; but, ten minutes after the museum was opened next morning, here came *three* Chinamen to hunt for that hidden document.

I notified Wilcox.

"I'll have reinforcements in half an hour," he replied.

Later, he spoke through the tube and told me that the cops had arrived, and that I could whistle when I was ready.

But it looked as if I hadn't anything to do with the ready business; for the chinks laboring so hard at the chest were having no more success than we had.

Day after day followed with the same lack of result. Sometimes three or four Chinamen would come, then again but two, and frequently only one. Not knowing their plans, Wilcox was obliged to keep at least three men on the job all the time.

Wilcox seemed kind of peeved when he and I would meet. Only one idea kept him perked at all.

"The chances are," he says, "that, if they keep on failing, it'll draw bigger game to our net. Even Hipcroaker Slagle may slip out for a try at the game."

Once more the days drifted on. Still men were being murdered in Chinatown. Still the combination remained unsolved. Gradually the number of Orientals who came to try their luck dropped off. Then came a day when not a one appeared.

"Stuff's off!" Wilcox says that night, glaring ferociously at me. "They've given it up. A fine piece of business, Jonah! You and your secret compartments! Prunes!"

"Blame it on me," I says. "I built the infernal chest, and I fired the shot heard round the world in your old fool tong war, and I'm sneaking this Slagle

pelican down dark alleys so's you fellows can't land him!"

It was late afternoon next day when, suddenly looking out at the chest, I saw another slant-eyed yellow man hovering over it. He was dressed in American clothes, but of a cheaper quality and of a poorer fit than his predecessors had worn. But, for all his hick appearance, he looked the chest over in a professional sort of way, sat down on it in a thoughtful mood for a long time, then sprang up, raised the lid, and looked inside.

Now he nodded his head wisely, grinned from ear to ear, closed the lid, and stooped. Instantly his long yellow fingers began caressing the ornaments.

"By golly!" I says. "This joker seems to have something new up his sleeve. Here's the expert at last."

Through the tube I heard Wilcox rubbing his hands together when I had told him. "Good work, Jonah!" he says. "And say, old top, just forget my little irritability, will you? Hey, Jonah, old chum?"

"Long ago, Wilkie," I says, "I placed thoughts of those cruel words in the pile with hoop skirts, music boxes, and muzzle-loading shotguns."

Well, that canary out at the chest did a lot more studying than fingering. At last dusk was coming. For some time no visitor had passed. I heard a whistle coming my way. It meant that the janitor was on his rounds to order all visitors outside. In five minutes the museum would be closed.

I didn't have my eye off the chest two seconds, I'll bet, while I glanced at my watch; but when I looked back through the whale's eye the Oriental had disappeared.

He hadn't had time to leave the room. But where was he? If I hadn't kept my eye fastened on that chest I'd never answered the question. But just then I saw the lid bob up about two inches, then settle in place again.

That pelican had crawled inside!

"Oh-ho!" I says. "Here's a pretty howdy-do! This looks like plans for the theft of the chest. Confederates of this cassowary will be outside tonight, eh?"

I blew the whistle and told Wilcox

"By George!" he says. "This does look serious. I'll get permission to hold down the office all night and send for ten men. We'll nab the whole gang, Jonah!"

"And I'll stay here in the whale to put you wise when to act," I says.

Just before it got too dark to see, and when all was quiet, I saw the lid of the chest raise a trifle. Then halfway out came a shoe, and the lid settled down on it.

"Getting kind of close in there," I chuckled.

Pretty soon came Wilcox's guarded voice through the tube. "Ten men are here," he says. "Let's know the instant your man moves."

Well, say, if that had been a live whale I'd 'a' been gnawing on his liver about midnight. And cold! And sleepy! But not a move from the direction of the chest.

Hour dragged after hour, and still no move. Then of a sudden a strange, low, monotonous noise came to my ears through the stillness. I place my ear to the whale's left eye.

"Aw-sng—aw-sng—snoop! Aw-sng —snoop! Aw-snph!"

That son of a gun was snoring his blooming head off!

I remembered how this yellow bird had kept looking in the chest, then sitting down to think. By golly, the combination of the thing might be somewhere inside! He'd already found it, got the papers, and was merely waiting till morning to make his get-away. There was no robbery, no——

And then, with that suddenness which marks one's going to sleep in the

midst of a long vigil, I dropped off into the land of nod.

It was daylight when I awoke with a guilty start. Rubbing my eyes, I glanced at the chest. The shoe still held up the lid. I breathed a sigh of relief. I thought I wouldn't whistle to Wilcox—I sort of hated to, you know.

But just then I heard his low voice through the tube. "You confounded fool, you've been asleep! I've been trying to get you for two hours. Didn't dare whistle. Well, you've spilled the beans, now! Is the chest gone?"

"It is not," I replied. "The chink's still in it."

"Then how about your big robbery?"

"It—it—I guess I was wrong about that," I says; and went on to explain my theory about this bird already having the loot.

Wilcox grunted. "Well, we'll keep on the job till he tries to sneak out with it. Ten big stiffs here, armed to the teeth, yawning their heads off, waiting to nail one knock-kneed chink!"

A little after the opening hour I saw the shoe disappear and the lid come down. After a little the lid raised again, and a swarthy, grinning face appeared. Black-bead eyes scoured the lay of the land, then the lid went clear up, and out popped the yellow man.

"He's out," I told Wilcox through the tube.

I glanced again through the whale's eye. There sat that confounded cassowary on the chest, combing his black hair with his fingers.

"The nut thinks he lives here," I says.

An hour passed. The yellow man still sat on the chest, wrapped in stupendous thoughts. Twice Wilcox had called me, and both times he'd just said, "Well?"

For fifteen minutes more that bird sat there, his chin in his hand. I was so mad I was sick with it. What in thunder was the matter with him?

A little later he came out of his dope, stretched, and began walking slowly about. Just about this time a young, well-dressed white man, with the jaw, shoulders, and arms of a prize fighter, came stealthily into the room, glanced about in a mysterious way, and dropped an envelope into the hole in that infernal coin of Yap. Then he walked rapidly on, his muscles bulging through his clothes, to some other room of the museum.

I glanced at the yellow man. Undoubtedly he had seen the white man's act; for now he hurried to the old grindstone, reached down into the hole, and brought out the letter. Even at my distance from it I could see big Chinese characters written on the envelope.

Then, before I could do anything, here came over a dozen young Chinese on the run, dodging this way and that, scurrying into corners, jabbering, and waving their hands.

"Heavens and earth!" I gasped, and grabbed the tube. "Hipcroaker Slagle just passed through and left a message in Chinese for our man!" I cried. "A dozen tong men are in the room! Come quick, or they'll carry off the chest before my very eyes!"

Now events followed fast. There came the heavy tramp of ten big-footed cops on the run. They charged into the room like a British tank, bearing down on the surprised Chinamen. Wilcox dived straight for the man with the letter and thrust his gun in his face. The confusion gave me a chance to slip through the trapdoor in the whale's belly, and in another instant I was racing through the various rooms after the white man.

I came up with him in the art gallery. I stuck my Colt in his face. "Hands up, Hipcroaker Slagle!" I yelled.

He obeyed, suddenly white as a sheet, and walked ahead of me meekly enough.

Every chink was corralled when I marched my captive back to the scene of the festivities. Wilcox still held his gun on the original offender with one hand, and with the other held the envelope with the chink writing on it before his eyes. He glanced up as my little procession moved in.

"Who's that bird?" he growled.

I threw out my chest. "Allow me to introduce Hipcroaker Slagle," I announces.

"I'll allow you to soak your head in the bay!" says Wilcox. "I know that man. He's Mr. Nicholas Mason. How are you, Nick?"

"Er—quite well, thank you," quavered Mr. Mason.

"Is—is he a—a gunman?" I faltered.

"Ask him!" sneered Wilcox. "I've known him for six years as physical director of the Y. M. C. A."

There was a long pause. Somehow or other I began to miss my supper and breakfast more than ever. Then some clabberhead had to laugh.

"Nick," says Wilcox, "you'll excuse my part in this when you know that I gave ear to the voice of a fool. Can you explain why said fool brought you in here with a gun trained on you? Put it up, Jonah—it might go off."

"Why," says Nicholas Mason, "I'm sure I can't imagine; but I see there is some mistake, and that my boys are in trouble, too. I can explain what we're doing here, at least.

"You see, these boys are members of the Chinese Y. M. C. A. of which I am physical director. Once every year we have a little game similar to the one we're playing now. I let my boys know that, on a certain day, I will hide ten scholarships in various public buildings of the city. This narrows the hunt down, you see, so it is not so difficult. They spend the day in searching the public buildings for these scholarships, which mean a great deal to the finders.

"This morning I contrived to hide three downtown—one in the post office, one in the library, and one in the U. S. subtreasury. They found these so easily that I decided to try the Memorial Museum for the fourth prize.

"But they got on my trail and followed me out here. They were right at my heels when I ran in. I had just time to drop a scholarship in the hole in that big stone and run on to the art gallery, when they came clattering in behind me.

"I see that this young man has found it, but he is not a member of the Y. M. C. A."

"Who is he, then?" asked Wilcox.

"I can't tell you that," says the physical director.

"Have you any more of these scholarships about your clothes?" asked Wilcox. "I'd like to paste a scholarship in a kindergarten school on the end of Jonah's nose and see if he could find it!"

Then Wilcox turned to the grinning hombre who found the envelope. "It ain't yours," he says, taking it from him and throwing it up in the air. It fell into the yellow hands of a smiling Y. M. C. A. boy, who thrust it in his pocket.

"Now," says Wilcox, turning again to the man from the ebony chest, "who are you?"

I thought the fellow would tie that grin back of his neck. Then his black eyes lighted on something beyond the group, and his lips went straight and sober.

Into the room came a big cannibal in a silk hat, a yellow silk vest, and coat and trousers of English plaid, and with rings in his ears. Following him was a little old man with a weather-beaten face, wearing a double-breasted blue serge and a steamer cap. Behind him came a green-skirted girl of the same breed as the cannibal. And in rear of the whole push trailed Doctor Hiram

Emanuel Purdy, A. A. A. S., A. G. G. S., W. C. T. U., et cetera.

This solemn procession marched through our midst, casting curious glances at us, and drew up in a semi-circle before the coin from Yap. Whereupon the man who'd caused us all the trouble flung himself flat on his face before the gazook with the yellow vest.

Yellow Vest looks at the grindstone, and a broad grin splits his face. With one big foot he touched the prostrate figure on the head, and the figure sprang erect.

They faced each other, these two. The girl stepped forward and began flouncing her terrible green skirt from side to side.

"Goo-goo pot-snicker wump!" says the old heathen.

"Oo-loo possum-snatcher goo!" replies the other.

The big pelican takes the girl's hand and places it in that of the man from the ebony chest. Then the little old weather-stained canary took off his cap and spit on the floor.

Wilcox scratched his head. "Initiate me, too," he says.

Just here old P. D. Labranza, who'd just arrived at the museum and heard the news, came tearing in. He gasped and grabbed Doctor Purdy's hand.

"What is it?" he cried.

They both talked at once for a while, and doc pulled some Jabberwocky with the grinner; and when the scientist had got our side of the deal he told us his.

"So you thought this boy was a Chinaman?" says the doc.

"Ain't he?" I says meekly. "He looks like one to me."

"Tut-tut!" clucks the doc. "Such lack of discernment! Why, this boy is from the Island of Yap. I brought him and the girl with me to accompany me on my lecture tour."

"Yes, sir," I says, avoiding Wilcox's eye.

"This gentleman in the yellow vest," the scientist went on, "is a big chief among the Yaps. He is the father of this girl.

"Coming over on the vessel of Captain Roebuck Gasset, here"—he indicated the little old weatherbeaten gull—"this boy and girl fell in love. So when Captain Gasset made his next trip back to the islands to trade for copra, he carried a message from the boy to the girl's father asking her hand in marriage.

"The captain returned with the information that his daughter would cost the young man a two-ton coin.

"The boy did not possess so much money, though in Yap he had a one-ton stone. Years ago, he now tells me, his family was robbed of another one-ton coin. It is the only theft on record in the islands, I believe. The coin lay near the beach, and everybody knew it belonged to his family, and considered it safe.

"But"—and here the doctor smiled apologetically—"I very much fear that Professor Staves, who visited the islands in 1901, allowed his scientific zeal to—er—— Well, at any rate, here in the museum the boy found the original coin which was stolen from his family.

"So he confided his secret to Captain Gasset. And the captain, who was just sailing back again to the island, promised to bring the girl's father, if he would come, so that he could see the stone. The captain and the chief here are good friends, and have traded together for years.

"The chief—you would not remember names if I mentioned them—was willing enough to come and be convinced that the boy really had found his lost property. The ship dropped anchor here last night, and this morning the captain brought the chief here to show him. He has now seen the stone and recognizes it. It belongs to

the boy by right of inheritance. The chief accepts it, together with the other stone in Yap, for his daughter's hand."

"Then we are to lose this most unique relic!" gasped old P. D.

"By no means," said Hiram Emanuel. "The stone may remain where it is. It belongs to the chief now, and we all are witnesses to the transaction. It is as safe here as anywhere. The chief will spend it when he sees fit, tell the new owner of its whereabouts, and everything will be satisfactory. This is in accordance with the laws of Yap."

I saw an inquiring look on Wilcox's face as he reached down and pinched his own leg. Then he nodded his head.

"Well, that's all right with me," I says. "I'm glad the boy got the girl, and all that, and I think the old bird's vest is a whirlwind for class. But why did this kid come sneaking round here posing as a Chinaman?"

"He was standing guard over his coin until the captain's ship should arrive, he tells me," explained Doctor Purdy. "He was taking no more chances; and he adds that when he saw Chinamen hovering so close to it day by day he became more suspicious than ever, and spent every odd moment in the museum watching them from cover. Last night, he says, knowing that the captain's ship had arrived in the harbor, he was so worried that he decided to sleep in that chest and guard his treasure all night. He said it was the first chance the Chinamen had given him to go anywhere near his coin."

"And why did he fiddle with the gilligans on the chest?" I says.

"He was perhaps merely curious. He says he had seen the Chinese do the same."

"Humph!" I says. "And what did he want with that scholarship?"

"Nothing. He saw a man drop it in his stone, he tells me, and thought he would investigate. A curious race, gentlemen—a curious race!"

I looked at Wilcox. Wilcox looked at me. Then Wilcox looked at the Yap and Yapess, standing hand in hand, both grinning.

Wilcox pointed his finger at the boy. "So that fellow is a Yap?" he growled.

"Beyond a question," replied the doc.

Wilcox shakes his head. "You're scientifically wrong," he says. "I'll show you the excellent high, thrice-exalted kokomozook of the Ancient Order of Yaps. Right here, men, is the original great-grandfather of all the Yaps in the world," he says.

And he leveled his finger at me.

Hipcroaker Slagle was never caught, and the tong war eventually died a natural death. Willie Wah Wong is still the big rooster of the Bing Kong Tong. For a year afterward I spent every spare moment fiddling with the gilligans on the ebony chest, but that confounded devil box still keeps its secret.

WOMAN CAUGHT PASSING BAD CHECKS

MRS. EDITH STEWART, alias Butler, alias Harriet Irene Lindley, was arrested at the Grand Central Terminal, New York, not long ago, by Detectives Sullivan and Brosnan, of the sixth branch. The charge is passing worthless checks. She was traced through a dozen cities in the Middle West, where it is alleged she operated.

The prisoner is young and unusually pretty. She has two children, but does not live with them or her husband. The complainant in the case is Samuel Brown, of No. 792 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn. It is charged the woman realized one hundred dollars on a check signed Melville J. Wood.

A Spinner of Death

by Douglas Grey

Author of "Harvey Gladstone's Heirs," "Tenants of Mystery," "The Threefold Disappearance," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

AT a meeting of a secret brotherhood, Dave Hand is selected by the turning of a "fixed" wheel of chance to kill a certain man in New York, living in Apartment 45, The Terrace, Braham Square. The afternoon of his departure on his mission, Thorndyke Flint arrives in the little town of St. Bride's, where Dave and his wife Martha live. He learns that Martha is the niece of Archer C. Downs, a former resident of St. Bride's, who has made a fortune in the West, and is now desirous of looking up his relations with a view to benefiting them. Flint is surprised to notice Joseph Anthony Stone, a prominent New York editor of unscrupulous character, traveling by train from St. Bride's to the neighboring town, Sandgate. He follows him and his companion, Foster Tompkins, to the meeting place of the brotherhood, an old, disused hotel, near the beach. Tompkins makes an unsuccessful attempt on Flint's life while on board steamer coming up to New York, and is himself cast overboard in the tussle. His body is not recovered. Arrived in New York, Flint puts his assistant, Frank Judson, on the trail of Dave Hand, and discovers that Stone is impersonating an eccentric old philanthropist, named Enoch Dibble. He also learns that Foster Tompkins is the stepson of Archer C. Downs, his right name being Francis Troutman, and that the wealthy old man plans to disinherit him because of his profligate ways. Flint now feels certain that Archer C. Downs, the uncle of Dave Hand's wife, is the man marked for death. While watching the apartment house known as The Terrace in Braham Square, Flint is surprised to see Judson climb out of one of the windows and down into the courtyard where he is waiting.

CHAPTER XXV.

FRANK JUDSON, THIEF.

"WHEW! That was something of a surprise party!" Flint's assistant ejaculated.

"A surprise party?" Flint queried softly. "What do you mean? What's going on up there?"

At that moment a grating sound reached their ears from above, followed by excited voices. Judson grinned in the darkness, and, twisting his head about, peered cautiously upward. Flint followed his example.

The window from which Judson had emerged was now more brightly lighted than before, and in the square of light appeared the heads and shoulders of two men side by side. Evidently they were peering down into the dark courtyard in search of some one, but both of the detectives knew that their eyes were not yet accustomed to the darkness, and that there was no danger of themselves being seen.

"That's why I chose that route instead of the front stairs," Judson informed his chief, in a low tone, withdrawing his head.

"But who are they, and what were you doing up there?"

"The latest arrival was the celebrated editor of the *Weekly Critic*," Judson replied unexpectedly.

"Stone? You don't mean it!"

"Stone it was."

"But where did he come from? I've been out front for some minutes, and I didn't see anything of him."

"How long have you been here?"

"Oh, four or five minutes, I suppose."

"Then Stone must have entered the square just after you left it," Judson told him. "At any rate, he entered apartment fifty-two up there just before I lit out."

Flint was excited now. "That's interesting—mighty interesting," he whispered. "What was the matter, though? Did he spot you?"

Judson was about to answer when they heard the creaking of the window once more. The young detective looked up again, less cautiously this time.

The heads had been withdrawn, and soon Judson saw the light disappear from the window. The two men had moved from the window, and left it in darkness.

"They've given it up as a bad job and gone to the front of the apartment," Judson told his chief, speaking in a natural tone. "We can talk a little more freely now. No, Stone did not see me, but I felt sure he'd hear about my presence, perhaps immediately, and I was afraid he'd suspect me and make trouble. He's very suspicious, you know—doesn't trust anybody, because he knows he oughtn't to be trusted himself. I had a great opening up there, but his coming put my chances on the blink."

He paused for a moment, and Flint urged him to go on.

"First, will you describe Dave Hand once more—or that picture of him?"

Flint did so with a conviction that his assistant suspected the second man to be Martha's husband.

Judson listened intently.

"Well," he said, at the end, "that doesn't come very near it, but that fellow up there in fifty-two must be Hand."

He was about to go on when Flint suddenly seized him by the arm.

"We'd better make ourselves scarce," the detective said rapidly. "If Stone and Hand are both in that apartment above number forty-five, there's something doing, and they may come around the block in search of you. Let's get out of this."

They left the basement areaway and cautiously made their way toward the entrance of the court, prepared to hide themselves at any moment, and give their enemies a chance to pass them. No one entered the court, however, and they were soon out of it.

"Now, begin at the beginning and tell me all about it," Flint said, when they were clear of Braham Square, and had found a taxi to take them back to the hotel.

Judson complied, beginning with his experience with the driver of the baker's wagon, and ending with Stone's arrival at the apartment. Throughout, his attitude toward Dave Hand was a sympathetic one. "And you can be sure," he ended, "that Hand doesn't know who or what the scoundrel is."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I heard him address Stone as Dibble when he opened the door. That's pretty good proof, isn't it, that the little crook has pulled the wool over Downs' eyes in some way, and that Hand still thinks he's under the influence of the man whom he learned to trust and admire?"

Flint nodded.

"We won't quarrel about that," he said. "I'm inclined to agree with you that Dave Hand is being tricked into this, and that whatever is on foot has been pictured by Stone as a sacred duty, or something of the sort."

There was a brief silence, which Flint broke.

"You certainly seem to have things all your own way," he went on regretfully. "You couldn't have asked for anything better than to be taken in by Hand in that way, and in many respects it's a pity you had to sacrifice all the advantage you had gained. You were

in a false position, though, and I can imagine that you did not feel comfortable. Very likely, too, your fears in regard to Stone were well grounded. He would have been likely to demand that his accomplice turn you out, at any rate, and he might have discovered that you were in disguise.

"I'm not strong for regrets, though. I'm much more disposed to be thankful for what we've gained. We know just where to look for trouble now, and all we have to do—unless your flight scarces them into a change of plans or of bases—is to keep watch on those two apartments."

"You don't think we have enough evidence to justify us in asking for their arrest in advance of Mr. Downs' return?"

"I'm afraid not. It looks as if we'll have to delay until the last minute, and catch them in the act, if we can."

"That may endanger your client," Judson pointed out. "Things don't always turn out as we expect, you know, and if they should get Downs, after all——"

"They won't," Flint insisted. "I have a scheme that will serve the purpose, I feel sure, and prevent any risk to Downs. It just occurred to me."

"Good! What is it, chief?"

"I'm not sure that I'll tell you. Certainly, I'm not going to do so now, until I've worked out the details."

"Oh, very well!" his assistant remarked airily. "Meanwhile, you needn't lose any sleep over the construction those fellows may put upon my rather hurried departure. I provided for that."

"The deuce you did! How?"

Judson chuckled, and thrusting his hand into his pocket, produced a familiar clinking sound. His chief gave a grunt of understanding.

"I thoughtfully made away with some knives, forks, and spoons," the young detective said triumphantly. "In other words, I'm a thief, and proud of it."

Flint laughed aloud. "You do some pretty quick thinking at times, you rascal," he commented admiringly. "So you prefer to have them think you a thief, rather than a spy, eh? That's not half bad, my boy, and it won't leave much room for Stone's suspicions to get a foothold."

"So I thought," his assistant said quietly. "I'll have to find a way to return the loot later on, though. It's only plated, anyway."

His grin became audible once more, as their taxi drew up in front of the hotel on the Thames embankment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

STONE NAMES HIS TERMS.

THIS telegram reached me at eleven o'clock this morning, and I don't see any reason to doubt it. Your stepfather must have arrived. Dave Hand isn't likely to have made a mistake like that."

It was Joseph Anthony Stone who had spoken, and the man addressed was, of course, Francis Troutman, whom he had reached by phone, and met in the private room over an obscure restaurant.

As usual, Stone was trying to keep away from the others as much as possible, in order not to incriminate himself, and he did not dream that one of the men employed by Thorndyke Flint had followed him from his office to the rendezvous.

Troutman was sprawling on a hard leather couch in one corner of the room. His face still bore traces of his fight in the ship's stateroom and his battle with the waves, but he was pretty well recovered, and, to outward appearance, little the worse for his terrifying experience.

"Hanged if I can understand it!" he said. "I didn't expect him to arrive for

another two or three days yet. I wonder what has brought him back so soon."

Stone shrugged his shoulders. "Very likely the news that Thorndyke Flint has located Martha Hand, and found her worthy," the editor answered coolly.

His companion's expression was decidedly disagreeable. The suggestion was far from welcome to Troutman.

"There's no use in speculating about that, however," Stone went on. "The main thing is that Hand has wired me of Downs' arrival."

His small skin-and-bones form was almost lost in the big chair.

"You said you wanted to see your beloved stepfather before—before anything happened," he continued. "If you'll take my advice, you'll do that at once."

Troutman took a quick breath.

"You have seen Hand lately," he said. "Is he—is he still prepared to go on with it?"

Stone laughed harshly. "Hand is the sort of man who makes an excellent follower," he said. "As a matter of fact, Troutman—er, Tompkins, I mean—the idea of doing what he's expected to do absolutely sickens him, but his loyalty to that precious Brotherhood of his outweighs everything else. You need have no fear. When the opportunity comes, he'll do the work. It doesn't matter to us how reluctantly he goes at it, or what happens to him afterward. The important thing is that Number Seven shall make good."

Troutman's face was white and tense. Stone looked at him searchingly. Thus far, nothing had been said about the mission—the one which Troutman himself had undertaken on the boat. Stone had heard of some of Flint's movements, however, and knew that the detective had escaped. He meant to question Troutman shortly.

"I'll go there this evening," the latter announced. "There's no fear of anything happening before then?"

He glanced apprehensively at Stone, who shook his head and smiled grimly.

"Oh, no," was the answer. "Nothing will happen until after your worthy stepfather goes to bed."

Troutman leaped to his feet and began striding up and down.

"Look here, Stone," he said, "if I should persuade him to give me a reasonable sum in a lump, you understand, don't you, that this thing isn't to happen?"

"I understand," the rascally editor replied. "Don't forget, though, that in that case you must get enough from him to share with me to the extent of not less than twenty thousand dollars. I would be willing to accept that under the circumstances, although you know that I shall expect much more from you if the original plan is carried out, and you come into possession of his estate. Don't overlook another detail, either. You must warn me in plenty of time if you succeed in making any such arrangement as that. Hand is all ready, and doubtless is waiting impatiently for the time to come. He must be headed off now, and it won't do for you to warn him. He won't take orders from any one but me." The thin lips twitched in a sarcastic smile. "Hand still imagines that I'm Enoch Dibble," he added. "I again took the precaution of wearing glasses last night to conceal the difference in the eyes."

He paused for a moment, and his thin shoulders shook with soundless laughter.

"I wonder what Dibble would say if he knew how active his double had been in the last few days," he murmured. "He'll find several little surprises waiting for him when he next visits Sandgate."

Troutman had paid no attention to the editor's last words. He came to a halt in the center of the room, and

looked at the little man whose warped cleverness he had enlisted in his behalf—he hardly knew how.

"Look here, Stone," he said, "you don't seem to take much stock in it, but I'm going to give the old fellow another chance. He has all kinds of money, and we may be able to come to some sort of a compromise. I'm willing that he should leave this Martha Hand a bunch of kale—a hundred thousand, or so, if he wants. Even ten thousand would be more than she ever dreamed of having in her life, probably."

"I don't care what arrangements you make," Stone told him wearily. "It's all one to me, so long as I receive the minimum I have named. Just see that you play fair with me; if you don't—well, there'll be more than one death in the family, that's all."

It was said very quietly. Troutman would have made three of Stone, but quailed visibly at the threat. It was evident that he was afraid—morally afraid—of the superior little man with whom he had become entangled.

"You—you know I'll play fair," he said, swallowing hard.

"I know nothing about it. I simply hope so—for your sake. And don't forget to tip me off before bedtime in regard to any change of schedule."

"I will, I will," Troutman promised, and left hurriedly, followed by one of Stone's frigid smiles.

He began to fear that he had enmeshed himself in the web that had been spun for Downs.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SOME DAMAGING THREATS.

FRANCIS TROUTMAN returned to his hotel. He was ill at ease now, and it seemed to him as though the day dragged. He was by no means of the nervous type, but although he had instigated the crime in prospect, he was beginning to feel decidedly shaky, now that the hour drew near.

He forced himself to eat some lunch, then wandered about the streets for three or four hours, in order to kill time. Finally he headed for the Terraces about seven o'clock in the evening.

The street door was open, as usual, and he ascended to the second floor without encountering any one outside of number forty-five. He stopped and knocked at the door.

There was a long pause, but finally, just as he was about to knock again, he heard shuffling footfalls. Presently, the door opened.

The figure in the dressing gown that stood in front of him was that of his stepfather, Archer C. Downs. Not quite sure of his reception, but summoning his courage, and assuming an ease of manner which he did not feel, Troutman strode across the threshold, and held out his hand.

"How are you, father?" he asked.

It was rather dark in the corridor, and Troutman could not see the expression that passed across the great bearded face.

"So you have turned up again, have you?"

The voice was clear and penetrating, and full of scorn.

The door was closed behind him, and Troutman led the way into the study. He noted that the shades were drawn, and that the electric drop light on the table had been arranged so that its rays would fall on the most comfortable chair in the room. There was a paper lying beside the chair.

"I hope I didn't disturb you, sir," Troutman said, with assumed deference.

The figure in the dressing gown crossed the room and readjusted the lamp, just for the purpose of doing something, it seemed.

"That doesn't matter much, does it?"

Downs asked coldly. "I'm naturally surprised to see you, but—well, I'm used to surprises from you, and it's unnecessary for me to say that they are seldom if ever agreeable ones."

The iron-gray head was lifted, and through the lenses of horn-rimmed spectacles the keen eyes were fixed on Troutman's face. The younger man naturally had nothing to say in response, and the other smiled dryly.

"There's only one thing encouraging about this visit," Downs went on. "It seems a proper inference that since you have money enough to come on and live in New York, you are not going to make your customary touch. That would hardly be consistent."

Downs leaned back with an air of triumph, and there was a glint in his eyes as he surveyed Troutman.

Apparently, the latter did not know what to say. That home thrust had taken him by surprise, and made his errand a decidedly awkward one.

"That being the case, what else is it you want of me?" Downs asked presently.

Troutman raised his eyes with an effort, and looked at the man in the big chair. There was no suggestion of sympathy about the face. It was very hard and forbidding, as it always had been—in the stepson's experience at least.

"Look here, sir," the latter broke out at last, "I know what you've come to New York for. You're trying to find your brother's heirs. You told me that back in Montana—held it over my head, threw it in my face. I still have some claims on you, though, and——"

"Every claim you may have had has been met in full—more than in full," the other interrupted curtly. "I've helped you repeatedly, I've paid your debts and got you out of your scrapes again and again—for your mother's sake when she was alive, and because of her memory since she passed away. I overlooked and forgave as long as there was any virtue in it—until all hope that there was any good hidden in you had vanished into thin air. Now, as I told you before, I'm through. You'll never get another cent out of me."

Troutman began to argue hotly, and even indulged in veiled threats, but the figure in the chair seemed wholly unmoved. For ten minutes the lean blackguard stormed and raved, tramping up and down the room, in order to give vent to his feelings.

He came to a halt at last, however, and gazed down at the calm, bearded features.

"Don't drive me too far!" he panted. "During mother's life, and when she left you no children, you gave me every reason to believe that your fortune was to come to me—or most of it, at least. And now, by Heaven, I won't surrender without a struggle!"

He leaned across the table.

"I'm giving you a last warning," he went on, in a fierce voice. "You're thinking of making over your money to Martha Hand, but I swear she shall never touch a penny of it. I know you haven't altered your will yet, for you haven't seen this niece of yours—if she is your niece. Don't you see that I'm desperate? You had better be careful."

His whole frame shook, and his face was livid with anger. Downs did not seem in the least perturbed, however. He rose steadily to his feet and faced his stepson.

"You talk like a fool," he said, "a criminal fool. And you're too late, as it happens. I don't know how you learned of my presence here, or of the existence of Martha Hand. Your knowledge seems very suspicious, but we won't discuss that at present. You may be interested to know, however, that I've altered my will without seeing my niece. I completed that little task just before you came in."

"You—you've altered your will already?"

"That's what I said."

It seemed as though his words had dazed Francis Troutman. The tall man staggered back a couple of paces from the table, staring at the figure in front of him.

"I was on the point of securing a couple of witnesses in the building," the millionaire went on, very indiscreetly, it seemed. A smile appeared, a twisted, mocking smile.

"I wish I could ask you to be one of the witnesses," he continued, "but I'm afraid that's out of the question. Unfortunately, you wouldn't be likely to care about serving in that capacity, and if you did, I should be a little apprehensive as to the fate of the document."

That last suggestion coming on top of the others was too much for the evil spirit that animated Francis Troutman. It was not too late. He saw his chance, or thought he did.

From his livid lips a sound broke. It was more like the hunting cry of a wild animal than anything else.

Perhaps three yards separated him from the figure in the dressing gown, but, as Troutman's fury enveloped him and whirled him away in its vortex of passion, he hurled himself across that intervening space in one bound, and clutched insanely at the older man's throat.

"Curse you!" he cried thickly. "You're a bigger fool than I, to tell me that. Now we—we'll see who gets the money!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TROUTMAN LEARNS HIS MISTAKE.

TROUTMAN'S impetuous charge was apparently strong enough to throw the other off his feet, but to the tall scoundrel's utter surprise he failed in his purpose.

He had expected to find an easy victim, but the resistance he met with taught him another lesson in a hurry.

His hands had not fully closed about his antagonist's throat before they were grasped in fingers that seemed to be made of steel, and with a swift jerk his hold was broken.

What happened immediately after that Troutman was in no position to say, although he was most nearly concerned.

Almost simultaneously the figure in the dressing gown wheeled, and the rascal was thrown in a half circle clean over the head of the man he had attacked. He came down with a crash in the far corner of the room, and lay there, dazed and gasping.

A few strides took the bearded man to his side, and before Troutman was alive to what was happening two cold steel bands clasped around his wrists, and there were a couple of clicks as the handcuffs locked.

The touch of the steel seemed to revive the dazed man slightly, for he raised his head. He saw the figure in the dressing gown step back. Then one hand went up to the features, and to Troutman's utter astonishment the beard and grizzled hair vanished, revealing a strange, clean-cut face—a face that he recognized.

From his lips there broke a gasp of fear.

It was the man whom Joseph Anthony Stone had pointed out to him, the man he had attacked on the boat—in short, Thorndyke Flint himself.

"The comedy is at an end, Troutman," the detective said quietly. "Your part in it, however, seems to indicate that it was staged and played fairly well."

"You infernal meddler! What are you doing in father's rooms?" demanded Troutman.

Flint smiled. "I looked at home,

didn't I?" he asked. "As a matter of fact, it strikes me that I have more business in the apartment than you have. For the present, though, you are to remain here, although I intend to put you out of my sight. You've revealed yourself as about the yellowest of yellow dogs to-night, Troutman, and the sight of you isn't agreeable to me."

Troutman writhed under Flint's scorn—at the whole situation, in fact. He had been completely deceived, for not only were the face and figure exactly like those of his stepfather, so far as he could tell, but even the voice was a wonderfully accurate imitation. It seemed incredible, but such was a fact.

Thorndyke Flint had achieved another triumph of impersonation.

His prisoner knew only too well what it meant, and chills ran over him as he recalled the threats he had made. To be sure, he had not referred in any way to the plot which had actually been hatched against the millionaire, but he had said enough to involve himself if anything should happen to Downs.

And then his fears went a step further.

Was Downs there in the apartment, or only Flint? He was inclined to accept the latter alternative, but he could not be sure. As the moments passed, however, and his stepfather did not appear, he became more and more certain that the detective had been alone in the place when he arrived.

Probably his stepfather had made no change in his plans. Evidently, Flint had arrived that morning, disguised as Downs, and it had been that arrival which Dave Hand had promptly reported to Stone. If that were the case, Downs himself was, in all probability, still in Florida.

Troutman's arrest meant the loss of the fortune he had schemed for, and suggested that his trip to the East was about to end in a prison cell. He ground his teeth at the thought. But what else did it mean?

At that, his blood ran cold.

Suddenly he recalled Stone's repeated warning about letting him know of any change in the situation, in order that Dave Hand might be prevented from carrying out his instructions. Good heavens! What if the detective should occupy Downs' bed that night, and the fate that had been prepared for the millionaire should descend upon him?

He had a vivid imagination—too vivid for a very successful criminal—and he pictured to himself what a hue and cry there would be if the great Thorndyke Flint should be found dead in Archer C. Downs' apartment. Every one who had had anything to do directly or indirectly with such a death would be certain to be hunted down tirelessly and without mercy, and to suffer the extreme penalty.

The scoundrel shuddered at the picture.

Yet, how was he to warn Flint without betraying the plot against Downs, and heaping up the evidence against himself?

He did not know. There seemed to be no way out of it, in fact. Hand was in the flat above, to be sure, but he might as well have been miles away, since there was no means by which the helpless Troutman could communicate with him.

"If he'd only leave me here alone with that telephone for five minutes, I might be able to reach Stone," he told himself. "I'm afraid there's nothing to it, though. Flint wouldn't make a break like that, and, even if he did, I mightn't be able to get a connection in time. This certainly is a mess! Isn't there any way out of it?"

It was soon evident that there was. Flint himself offered it, but it proved to be far from acceptable. In fact, the bare thought nearly turned Troutman's hair white.

"Stand up!" Flint said sternly.

The tone of command was enough in itself to lift Troutman to his feet, but as an additional incentive the wretch caught the glint of an automatic in the detective's hand.

Troutman got up with alacrity, his staring eyes fixed on Flint's strong face.

"I could telephone to headquarters and have the police come for you at once," the detective informed him. "I have plenty of evidence against you—more than you dream of. For reasons of my own, however, I don't intend to pursue that course just at present."

Evidently, Flint saw a gleam of hope in his prisoner's eyes, for he added grimly: "Oh, don't get excited! I said nothing about letting you go, and I have an idea you would find it exceedingly difficult to escape from me. The disposition I intend to make of you is merely a temporary one."

He paused for a moment.

"Turn around and face that door," he went on presently. "Now, out into the hall with you. Left, right—one, two, three, four! To the right now, and open that door!"

Troutman did as ordered, although very slowly and reluctantly. Flint touched a switch in the hall, and light sprang up in the room thus opened. Troutman saw that it was a bedroom, and suddenly his nails dug into the palms of his manacled hands.

He guessed what was coming, and the thought turned him sick. A moment later Flint confirmed his instinctive fear.

"This is the main bedroom of the apartment," the detective announced, in a peculiar tone, watching his captive narrowly as he did so. "Naturally, therefore, it is the one Mr. Downs would be expected to occupy if he were here. I'm going to do you the honor of placing it at your service to-night."

He pointed to the bed in the corner.

"You are going to occupy that," he said, "and I'm going to lash you to it to make sure that you don't walk in your sleep."

The look of abject fear that surged into Francis Troutman's face, turning his very skin a sickly green, told the detective in general what he wanted to know.

He had suspected that an attempt was to be made on Downs' life when the millionaire occupied that room—an attempt that would be made possible, in some way as yet unexplained, by the fact that Dave Hand was in possession of the apartment immediately above.

Now he knew it, and, furthermore, he was sure that Troutman expected Hand to commit the crime that night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON THE RACK.

BUT the tall scoundrel betrayed himself even more unmistakably in the recklessness of his terror. His knees shook visibly, and with a clink of metal he thrust out his handcuffed hands in a gesture of cowardly appeal.

"No, no!" he cried, his voice edged with horror. "For Heaven's sake, don't let me sleep in that bed! Put me anywhere else—in a chair, or anywhere. Send for the cops if you want to—the sooner the better. But I—I can't stay in this room!"

Then realizing how incriminating was his outburst, he quickly tried to cover it up.

"I—you must think I'm an awful coward," he said, with a quick change of tone. "I—I'm superstitious, though, and—and I often see things other people don't. I'm sure a man has died in that bed—murdered. I saw it all then—the whole horrible business. I couldn't sleep a wink if——"

"Nonsense!" the detective broke in. "You'll do as I tell you. I don't take any stock in such things, and I don't intend to give in to your whims."

It was not Flint's purpose just then to reveal, in so many words, what he suspected. He chose rather to leave Troutman in the dark, so far as possible, not knowing whether his captor had hit upon that room by accident or by design.

Beads of perspiration were standing out on Troutman's face now, and his whole aspect had altered. Suddenly, with a snarling cry, he raised his steel-encased arms and made a mad plunge at Flint.

One of his doubled fists caught the detective a fierce blow on the temple, driving him back a pace, but before Troutman could take advantage of his temporary success, Flint recovered himself, hauled off, and sent one quick, straight right full into the rascal's face.

That one blow settled the matter, for Troutman crumpled up with a groan, and the next moment his elongated figure was sprawling on the floor.

After ascertaining that the fellow was unconscious, Flint's next act was a curious one. He glanced at the bed, but before transferring his prisoner's body to it he looked up at the ceiling.

All the lights in the room were turned on, and with the aid of their glare Flint surveyed the whole surface above him as he had done more than once before that time. Seeing nothing now—nothing out of the ordinary at all, in fact—he lowered his eyes and went to the window.

There was only one window in the room, and, as Flint had previously ascertained, there was nothing near it by which an entrance could be effected from above—no fire escape, no drain pipe.

Seemingly, the only way in which Dave Hand could make use of that window to let himself down from the one above was by means of a rope.

The detective wished to make sure that the situation there was unchanged. It was, and he closed and locked the window, leaving the room without ventilation.

Dave would have some work on his hands if he tried to gain an entrance at that point, and, meanwhile, Flint meant to have plenty of warning.

These precautions having been taken, the detective returned to the prone figure on the floor. Troutman was no lightweight, but Flint knew just how to handle such burdens. He caught the unconscious man under the arms, dragged him to the side of the bed, and then, freeing one hand, pulled down the covers.

Having lifted his prisoner into the bed, he tied him there, so that he could not leave it, and then covered Troutman—fully clothed though the latter was—to the chin. Before leaving the room, Flint popped a gag into the man's mouth and secured it there.

He surveyed his handiwork with satisfaction, gave another quick survey of the ceiling, switched off the lights, and returned to the study, leaving the prisoner to recover consciousness in the darkness.

Flint seemed preoccupied, however, and in less than fifteen minutes he was back in the bedroom. To his disappointment, Troutman had not yet recovered consciousness. Even while Flint looked at him, the scoundrel showed signs of reviving, and his captor waited expectantly.

Flint watched the eyes flutter open, and saw them travel about the room until they rested on his face. Then the dazed, puzzled expression gave place to one of hatred, and that in its turn was quickly blotted out by an expression of horror.

It was evident that Troutman realized his plight.

Flint saw the shoulders of his pinioned prisoner move spasmodically, indicating that the rascal was trying to free himself and found it impossible to do so.

"I wouldn't go to all that trouble if I were you," Flint told him quietly. "I'm something of an expert in such things, and I took considerable pains to make you fast. Apparently, you had serious objections to sleeping in this particular bed, but your excuses did not appeal to me, and I saw no reason to change my plans. You are here now, and here you'll stay—unless you're prepared to give me some better reason for moving you."

The gag between Troutman's lips prevented him from saying anything, and his attempts at conversation were nothing but muffled, inarticulate mumblings. There was no mistaking the absolute fear in his distended eyes, nevertheless, and Flint thought that he might be ready to confess.

"How about it?" the detective went on. "Do you still stick to that ghost story? Have you anything else to tell me? If you have, nod."

Indecision came into those telltale orbs. It was clear that frantic debate was taking place in the prisoner's mind. At length, however, he shook his head.

Doubtless, he longed to tell, in order to extricate himself from the position which he seemed to find so harrowing, but he did not dare.

Flint did not argue the point. "Just as you say," he announced. "Good night!"

And he promptly marched out of the bedroom, closed the door behind him, and snapped off the lights from outside.

His head was down, and his hands behind him as he paced along the corridor on his way back to the study.

"It's altogether too early for the fellow to be in any real danger," he decided. "He's in no condition to count on that, though, and I hope that a little more darkness and silence will do the trick, and make him ready to tell me the whole thing. There's no doubt that I'm putting him through a terrible ordeal, but that can't be helped. I must play upon his fears as much as I can, for it might not be enough merely to arrest him and his accomplices. I might be unable to establish the means by which they intended to kill Downs, and without that the case would be incomplete."

CHAPTER XXX.

FLINT IS DELAYED.

THE appearance of Thorndyke Flint at the apartment in The Terraces, on Braham Square, was the result of a new plan which he had formulated the previous evening, and to which he had alluded in conversation with his assistant.

Frank Judson's discovery that Dave Hand was occupying the apartment above number forty-five, and had been visited by Stone himself, was all that was necessary to convince the detective that the rascals were going to strike at that point as soon as Downs should return from Florida.

His sympathy for Martha Hand, and his desire to "pluck the brand from the burning" whenever possible, made him instinctively think of seeking an interview with Dave, and of trying to dissuade him from any further association with Stone and Troutman. He was inclined to believe that Dave would listen to him and come to his senses.

There were other things to be thought of, however, and Flint was obliged to give up that tempting idea in the end.

Not for a moment did he relinquish the hope of saving Dave Hand from actually becoming a murderer, but he realized that such a course would be likely to defeat his own ends and the ends of justice.

Whatever might be thought of Dave himself, Flint knew that Stone and Troutman were menaces to the community, and he was determined to trap them, if it were humanly possible. But

if Dave should desert at the eleventh hour, they might give up the project, even though they remained in ignorance of his real reasons for failing them.

Flint did not want them to give up—he wanted them to commit themselves far enough to make their arrests and conviction assured. Therefore, in order to bring that about, he felt compelled to leave Dave alone as long as possible.

That avenue being closed to him, it was characteristic of him that he should decide to disguise himself as Archer C. Downs, in the hope that he would be able thereby to hurry matters and at the same time to take upon himself whatever risks might be involved.

No definite plan of that sort had been in his mind when he first went into the case, but he had taken occasion, more or less mechanically, to study the heavy Westerner—his walk, voice, tricks of gesture, and so on, as well as his build and appearance. That sort of thing had become a habit with Flint, and he took in such details almost unconsciously. There was no knowing when they might come in handy.

Here he was now in the apartment which Downs was destined to occupy, and accepted as Downs by all those with whom he had come in contact in the building. Thus far, the deception had worked just as he had meant it to. It was evident that Hand had notified the conspirators of "Downs'" arrival, and that it was owing to that information that Troutman had come to Braham Square.

The unscrupulous stepson's object had been perfectly plain to the detective from the beginning of the interview. He guessed that Troutman had decided to make a last play for some of the millionaire's money, in the hope that extreme measures would be unnecessary.

Thanks to the excellence of his disguise, Flint had managed to fool the man completely, and to trap him into some damaging threats and admissions. Now he had Troutman on the rack, but it remained to be seen what was to come of it. As a matter of fact, he was sorry for the poor devil, but he knew that he could not allow himself to indulge in sentiment under such circumstances.

Stepping to the study table, on which the false wig and beard lay, he began once more to assume his disguise. His movements were slow and suggestive of thoughtfulness.

Again he was asking himself what lay behind that terror which he had seen revealed in Francis Troutman's face. It could hardly have been inspired by the mere fear of legal punishment, for he had not showed it when first handcuffed. It was only when he was ushered into the bedroom, and particularly when he was told that he was to occupy that bed.

Was there something queer about the bed itself?

That thought had occurred to the detective while Troutman was still unconscious, but an examination had failed to reveal anything out of the ordinary about the bed. It was, indeed, a puzzle, and the rascal's panic was beginning to be a serious matter.

The look in his eyes haunted Flint, and the detective began to pace up and down the room, deep in thought. The very air seemed charged with mystery, and there was a sense of some grim tragedy lurking in that commonplace block of apartments.

So long as things remained as they were, Archer C. Downs was in no danger, of course, and Flint himself seemed to be in no more peril than might be expected—no more than he was in most of the time, for that matter. But he had deliberately placed Troutman in what was evidently the danger zone. Had he been justified in

that, and if so, how long should he risk leaving the man there?

Flint was too humane to subject any one to needless danger; nevertheless, the cause of justice often made necessary certain things which the detective would not have thought of doing otherwise. In this case he was anxious to wring the truth from Troutman, and he felt confident that Hand would make no attempt on the life of the man who was supposed to be the destined victim until much later that night—probably not until long after all the lights were out in Downs' apartment.

On the other hand, Flint knew only too well that groundless fear is just as potent as fear that has every justification in fact. In other words, he did not make the mistake of belittling the possible effect of the experience on his prisoner. Troutman might be in no real danger at the time, but if he thought he was—as he evidently did—his fears alone might plunge him into a serious condition, possibly even bring on brain fever.

Yet Flint did not wish to give up all hope of a confession unless he were actually obliged to. The question, therefore, was how far he could go, how long he could leave the cowardly Troutman there in the dark?

He was to return to the bedroom in order to see if his captive was in a less obstinate mood, but he was delayed by a ring at the bell.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ANOTHER VISITOR.

FRANK JUDSON knew, of course, what Flint was about, and had been taking charge of affairs during the detective's absence from the house.

He had received word from his chief once or twice during the day, but when evening came and dinner was over he grew restless for some reason, and at length decided to go to Braham Square.

There had been no definite arrangement with regard to coöperation between the two, for Flint's original idea had been that nothing was likely to happen that day, owing to the fact that Downs' supposed arrival would be unexpected and would take the conspirators by surprise.

He had debated whether he should disguise himself or not, and had decided against it. It seemed unnecessary, provided he took reasonable precautions against being seen by Stone, should the latter appear. As a matter of fact, it was by no means certain that Stone would recognize him, anyway.

As for his newsboy disguise, that was of no further use to him now. In fact, it would have been fatal to his plans to show up in it in that neighborhood.

He alighted from his taxi a short distance from the Terraces, and sauntered into the square, keeping on the other side of it at first.

When he arrived opposite the row in which the two apartments were situated, he studied the windows. No lights were to be seen in those of number forty-five, for Flint had closed the inside shutters and drawn down the shades, so that no one could spy on him.

In the apartment above, however, a couple of windows were lighted, and once, as he watched, Judson saw a heavy-set figure pass in silhouette across the shade. It was obviously that of the man who had taken him in the previous day, and whose hospitality he had been obliged to leave so unceremoniously.

Judson hung about for perhaps half an hour or so, but saw nothing unusual. He then made up his mind to enter the building, and, if the coast seemed clear, to pay Flint an unexpected visit.

He encountered no one in the halls, and after listening at the keyhole of number forty-five, he rang the bell. He had heard no voices, and had come to

the conclusion that he would not be spoiling any important play of his chief's.

It was Judson's arrival which had interrupted Flint's musings, and delayed his return to the bedroom.

The detective was rather surprised to have his assistant walk in undisguised, but made no objection to the visit. In fact, he seemed to welcome it.

"This isn't on the program, my boy," he said, after the first greetings were over, "but I imagine you may come in handy—if we can only find the way to use you without gumming things up."

"I'm ready for duty," Judson declared. "What's doing?"

Briefly, Flint told him of the latest development, including Francis Troutman's arrival, the indiscreet demands the rascal had made, the stunning surprise that had been sprung on him by the detective's unmasking, and, finally, the state of panic in which he had been plunged.

"Now, it's that last phase of it that's worrying me," Flint continued. "Troutman is in there now in the dark, and probably scared stiff. I was just about to pay him another visit when you came in. It doesn't take a mind reader to come to the conclusion that the fate which has been decreed for Downs is connected in some way with that bedroom and that bed. Also, it looks as if Troutman knows that something is scheduled to happen to-night, and, finally, it seems reasonable to suppose that whatever is in prospect may be expected to come in some form or other from Dave Hand; otherwise, there would have been no particular object in Hand's occupancy up there."

"That looks like a case of two plus two," Judson remarked, with a nod. "What about it, though? Where do I come in?"

"I'd like to get a line on Hand's movements, if possible," Flint told him. "I haven't the heart to subject Troutman to this sort of thing much longer, and, to tell the truth, the uncertainty is getting on my nerves. I like to know what to expect. Do you think you can find a way to keep track of the doings of the man upstairs? You know the possibilities of number fifty-two better than I do."

Judson remained silent for perhaps half a minute.

"I don't quite see yet just how I'm going to do it," he replied at length. "I'll find a way, though—or blow up my boilers in the attempt."

Flint made a suggestion or two, but thought it best to leave the matter to Judson's discretion.

As soon as his assistant had gone, the detective started again for the bedroom, with the intention of putting Francis Troutman out of his misery whether he was prepared to confess or not. Fate seemed to have other plans for the lanky scoundrel, though, for the detective was halted a second time by the sound of some one at the door.

"Poor devil!" he thought, as he turned back. "I can't delay much longer, no matter what happens. If I do, there's no knowing what the consequences might be.

"I wonder what the dickens is up now?" he added mentally, on his guard in a flash, for a key was being inserted in the lock.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CHANCE LENDS A HAND.

THE task which Frank Judson had undertaken was not an easy one.

He had studied the surroundings very thoroughly, and knew that there were no windows which overlooked Dave Hand's, except one or two which were too far away to be of any practical use.

He thought at first of trying the more or less hazardous experiment of climbing the framework of the little dumb-

waiter hoist—or whatever they called it—at the rear, and gaining an entry through the kitchen window. He even made his way into the courtyard, and investigated the possibilities. The first glance showed him, however, that the kitchen was brightly lighted; and that being the case, it was more than probable that the room was occupied by Hand, or else that he expected to be in and out of it at frequent intervals.

Disappointed in this, the young detective went back through the courtyard and round to the front of the block again, his mind still battling with the problem.

Five minutes passed without bringing any more feasible plan, and he was beginning to be disturbed by his fear, when chance took a notion to enter the game.

Chance was thoroughly disguised in the uniform of a messenger boy, and appeared to be a young man in his twenties—a boy no longer, except in name. Judson did not really realize his good fortune at first, but it was soon made clear to him.

The two met outside the doorway leading to numbers forty-five and fifty-two. There was a letter in the messenger's hand, and he was looking up at the entrance a trifle uncertainly.

"Looking for somebody?" Judson asked quickly, beginning to tingle with expectancy.

"A party by the name of David Hand," was the answer. "Lives in this block somewheres—apartment number fifty-two."

Judson's heart gave a sudden bound, and began to thump madly.

Here was his chance, a heaven-sent one, seemingly—but how was he going to make use of it?

That would have puzzled almost any one, even if there had been minutes or hours for thought. As it was, however, the thing had been sprung on Judson without the slightest warning, and if he wished to profit by it, he must find a way in a twinkling, or before the messenger became suspicious.

There were moments when Frank Judson's brain could move with lightninglike rapidity, as it had often proved in the past. That was partly due to his natural cleverness and quickness, and partly to the training he had received under Thorndyke Flint's tutelage. The combination was hard to beat, and it proved adequate on this occasion, impossible as the task would have seemed to almost any one else.

Almost without a perceptible pause, the skeleton of a plan occurred to him, and he unhesitatingly began putting it into operation, trusting to the inspiration of the moment to fill out the details and clothe the bare bones as he went along.

He clapped the messenger on the shoulder, and burst into a hearty laugh, pretending to be enjoying a great joke.

"That's rich!" he gasped. "It certainly is. I live in number fifty-two, and it's my brother that that letter is for."

"I don't see anything funny in that," the messenger objected.

"You will when you hear the rest," Judson answered confidently, sobering down a little, and letting his hand rest confidentially on the other's shoulder. "You see, it's like this. My brother Dave—he's a little older than I am—is a big, strong chap, broad-shouldered, and all that. He's got a notion, too, that his brain is hard to beat, and he wants to become a detective. The fact is, he can't seem to think of anything else."

"What's that got ter do with me?" the messenger demanded a little impatiently. "Do yer want me ter speak a good word for him at headquarters, or what?"

Judson laughed again. "That's a good joke, too," he said, "but that isn't what I'm getting at. I tell Dave he

couldn't find a collar button under a bureau, and we have it hot and heavy. Just to-night we had another argument about it, and he bet me that I couldn't get into our apartment when he was there without his knowing it. I said I could. I gave up my key, and swore I'd come in somehow before midnight. As a matter of fact, I've just been around in the courtyard trying to see if there was no way by which I could climb up."

"Well?" prompted the messenger.

He was a little more interested in spite of himself, but it was evident that he failed to see why he should be told about this family argument.

"Don't you see?" Judson urged, with an eagerness that was not altogether forced. "You lend me your uniform—the cap and coat will be all I need—and stay down here while I take Dave's letter up to him."

"But he'll know yer in a second."

"Maybe he will, but I don't believe it. I just left the apartment about ten minutes ago, and he won't expect me to try anything so soon. Besides, he won't be looking for me on such an errand, and in uniform. He won't really look at my face at all. His eyes will be glued to the letter, which I'll hold out to him. I'll have the cap pulled down over my eyes, and I'll make my voice sound different."

Plainly, the messenger was becoming more and more impressed, and had no suspicion that he was being led astray. He was still reluctant, however, and Judson felt sure that he knew the reason.

"I ain't a piker," the young detective declared, with a grin, plunging one hand into his pocket as he spoke. "Here's a half, though, for your trouble. Come on, be a sport, and help me out."

The sight of the money was enough for the messenger. He made some further weak objections, but began fumbling at his coat.

"How will yer git into the apartment, though?" he asked, when the garment was halfway off. "I don't generally git beyond the door."

"Oh, I have quite a scheme for that, too," Judson assured him, and proceeded to explain.

The "boy" grinned appreciatively as his new acquaintance drew him into the lower hall and led him to a closet under the stairs, where the exchange was completed.

After cautioning the messenger to remain out of sight while he was gone, Judson took the bag which the other had carried, slung the strap over his shoulder, and, with the letter in his hand, mounted the stairs.

When he was out of the messenger's sight, however, he added another bit of preparation. Taking a piece of soft, plastic material from one of his trousers pockets, he rolled it into a ball and hid it into the palm of his hand.

It was a sort of wax, very easily shaped into whatever form desired, and yet easily handled. Flint and his assistants made frequent use of it to take impressions of keys, and so on, and that was how Judson happened to have it with him. The young detective intended to make an entirely different use of it this time—if the opportunity offered.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A HANDY BIT OF WAX.

JUDSON rang the bell of number fifty-two, and soon heard heavy footfalls along the narrow passage as Dave Hand came to the door. The latter opened a few seconds later, and Dave appeared.

"Does David Hand live here?" Judson asked, using an entirely different voice—one that, by no possibility, could Dave associate with that of the ragged

newsboy in whom he had interested himself.

"Yes, I'm David Hand," was the reply in Dave's deep tones.

"This is for you," the supposed messenger announced, thrusting the envelope forward.

He would have given a great deal to have been able to examine the contents, but that had been out of the question, for he had no facilities with him for such work, and might have been caught at it in the hall. Therefore, he was obliged to give the message to Dave unopened.

As for any possible recognition of him on Hand's part, that did not give him a moment's concern. Dave was not familiar with his features as they were, but only with the make-up he had used the previous day. If he had really been Hand's brother, as he had led the messenger to believe, it might have been a different matter. Even in that case, the young detective's argument would have had considerable weight, for such things have often happened.

Dave Hand took the note, grunted an acknowledgment, and was about to close the door when Judson thrust his foot forward.

"Sign, please," he said, holding out a rude book which the messenger had also turned over to him.

As he had explained to his ally downstairs, he was without a pencil—intentionally so. Moreover, Hand had not struck him as one who did much writing when he could help it, and therefore he was counting on the absence of a pencil in Dave's pockets as well.

As it turned out, he had made no mistake. If he had, however, he would have found some other way of doing what he meant to do.

"Where's your pencil?" Dave asked, taking the book.

Judson searched the pockets of his uniform.

"I must have lost it," he said, in apparent surprise. "Haven't you got one, either?"

"Not here. I'll have to go and get one."

Dave knew nothing of the grin of satisfaction in which the bogus messenger indulged as soon as his back was turned.

When the man vanished down the passage, leaving the door ajar, Frank Judson set to work at once. He thrust the little mass of wax into the opening of the frame of the door into which the bolt of the lock fitted when the key was turned. The stuff filled this space, and was packed in tightly, so that it offered considerable resistance.

To accomplish this task was the work of a few seconds only, and when Dave Hand came out of the kitchen, carrying the signed book, Frank was lounging against the wall of the opening.

"There you are," Hand announced. "Better see that you have a pencil hereafter. It will save a lot of trouble."

"I will," Judson promised. "Good night, sir."

The big fellow nodded curtly, then swung the door into its place. He was rather anxious to get back to the lighted kitchen to read the message which he felt sure was from Stone.

The previous tenant had lined the door jamb with felt, in order to prevent a draft. Dave was quite aware of this fact, and knew that the door never banged. Consequently, the silent way in which it swung into its place on this particular occasion did not arouse his curiosity.

He would have been considerably surprised, however, had he been able to note the movements of the supposed messenger. For as soon as his footsteps had died away, Judson, who had turned about and started along the

outer corridor toward the stairs, suddenly halted and approached the door once more.

Tiptoeing up as silently as a cat, with one ear cocked to listen for any suspicious sounds from within, and the other alert to catch any footfalls on the stairs, the detective laid a cautious hand on the knob, and gently turned it.

With a feeling of satisfaction, he noted that the door yielded as he had anticipated. He had observed that it was a spring lock, and, seeing that the door fitted snugly into the jamb, had concluded that the catch would not hold, for the simple reason that it could not push the wax out of the way when the door was closed, there being no place for the stuff to go.

Plainly, he had been right, and instead of the door having locked automatically, it was unfastened. That was just what Judson wanted.

He could not make use of the fact just then, however, but was obliged to hurry back downstairs, where the messenger was waiting for him.

"You've been a jolly long time about it," complained the other.

But Judson was ready with an explanation. "That's because my little scheme worked," he said triumphantly, giving the messenger a wink and a nudge. "It was just as I said it would be. Dave didn't know me at all, and I played the trick on him about the pencil. He took a long time hunting up one, and while he was inside rummaging about, I followed. That's how I got into the flat, you see, and I let him see me there, too, so that there would be no argument about whether I really got in or not."

He stopped, apparently overcome with laughter.

"Oh, it was a great lark!" he added. "Dave gave me a lecture for following him in—said I didn't have any business there. Then I took off my cap and invited him to have a look at me. Say, he was some surprised when he found out who it was!"

When the exchange had been effected once more, and the messenger had left, the richer to the extent of half a dollar, the young detective looked upon the coast as clear.

Three minutes later, with his light shoes stuffed into the pocket of his coat, he was treading softly toward the door of number fifty-two, bent upon gaining an entrance to the flat and finding out what Dave Hand was up to.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A RESERVED SEAT FOR JUDSON.

AFTER listening at the keyhole until he had satisfied himself that Hand was still in a distant part of the apartment, Judson quietly pushed the door open until there was a gap wide enough for him to enter.

The passage was in darkness, except at the farther end of it, where there was a broad shaft of light, which the intruder recognized as coming from the kitchen.

The door was not open, but the upper part of it was of glass, on which appeared a motionless shadow outlining a big head and a massive pair of shoulders.

"He's sitting at the kitchen table," Judson decided, "and it looks as if he had his back to the door."

He knew Flint's eagerness to learn something more of the conspirators' plans as evidenced by Dave Hand's movements. He was in no hurry, however, for he was aware that "haste makes waste"—and often causes failure as well.

As an evidence of his care and self-control, it may be noted that he stopped at the door long enough to take out his penknife and remove the wax from the slot. When that task was completed he closed the door, and this time the catch slipped into place.

The act would make it a little more difficult for Frank Judson to leave the flat, should he be obliged to do so in haste. He thought it better to remove the wax, however, for fear Dave should have occasion to go to the door once more, and, in opening it, should discover that some one had tampered with the lock.

In such an event, a search of the place would be almost certain to follow, and if Judson were still there it might be embarrassing, to say the least.

Now he moved slowly down the passage, every nerve on the alert. He was not only taking his life in his hands, in all probability, but was also running the risk of a discovery that would put the conspirators on their guard, and might easily defeat all of Flint's plans.

Both risks had to be run, however, and the steadiness of Judson's nerves was proof that he was not greatly concerned over what lay before him.

Presently he gained the end of the passage in safety, and, leaning forward, peered at the frosted glass panel of the door. The glass was of a pattern which had a number of stars in it, and these stars were plain, instead of frosted, so that through them the young detective could see Dave Hand's head.

The man from St. Bride's was leaning over the table, and there was a letter in his powerful hands. He seemed very much interested in it, even concerned, the watcher thought, but it was impossible to see the expression on his face.

He must have watched Dave for a couple of minutes before the man moved. It was only a lifting of the head then, but it made Judson start back a pace.

The apartment contained two narrow halls running at right angles, and the light from the kitchen door served to dispel much of the gloom of the second one. Judson was enabled, therefore, to note that there was a door open at the end of this other passage. If Dave should show signs of leaving the kitchen, it might be well to have some place in which to seek refuge.

The thought had hardly formed itself in the detective's mind when the scrape of a chair warned him that Hand was already on the move. With long, noiseless strides the intruder made his way along the hall to the doorway he had seen. He halted on the threshold for a moment, and, peering in, was able to make out the outlines of a bed and a few other pieces of bedroom furniture.

Having satisfied himself as to the nature of the room, he darted across the floor, dropped to his knees, and slipped under the bed.

He was just in time, for a moment later Dave came out of the kitchen and along the hallway. With a thrill, Judson realized that Hand was approaching his hiding place, instead of taking the other passage. The next thing he knew, Dave was actually in the doorway.

That was a little more than Judson had bargained for just then, but so much the better. He was there to spy on Dave Hand, and the bed promised to conceal him.

The click of the electric light followed, and the room flashed from obscurity into illumination. Judson, flat on his face, lay almost breathless. He could follow Dave's movements by watching his feet move to and fro, and at first he did not dare risk anything else.

Once the big fellow halted beside the bed, and his feet came within a few inches of the watcher's hand.

There was a valance around the lower part of the bed, and presently Judson wormed his way to the foot, and lifted one corner of the material a little higher. Until then he had not touched it, having made use only of an inch or so of space between it and the floor.

On the opposite side of the room there was a big wardrobe with a mirror set in the door of it. To his delight, Judson found that, from that angle, he could command a view of much of the room, thanks to the long mirror, and by squirming along a little further, he found it possible to bring Dave Hand within range.

The man was at the right of the bed, bending over the table Judson saw him pull out a drawer, and take from it a long, cylindrical object, apparently of heavy paper or cardboard. Holding the cylinder very carefully in his hands, Dave turned, and for the first time that night, Judson got a good view of his face.

The healthy tan had vanished, and now the big man's features wore a ghastly pallor, and were drawn in such a way as seemingly to change their expression.

The look, however, did not seem to be exactly one of terror. It was more like distaste, even abhorrence combined with extreme caution and nervousness.

It was the look of one who was by no means sure of himself, and was beginning to doubt the cause he had espoused—of one who felt himself driven to handling a dangerous tool which he did not thoroughly understand.

Carrying the tube as a man might carry some deadly bomb, Dave Hand crossed over and passed between Judson and the wardrobe.

He approached the left-hand corner of the room, where he placed the cylinder very carefully against the baseboard, making sure that it would not topple over. He then stepped back; and, bending again, tugged at one corner of the carpet until he had pulled away a considerable portion of it, revealing the boards beneath.

It may be taken for granted that Frank Judson watched these proceedings with the greatest interest. He found himself in a much better position than he could have hoped for, and he determined to make the most of it.

He saw Dave choose a particular spot and pry the boards with his big jackknife, which he had opened for the purpose. In response, a section of one of the boards, perhaps six inches in width and eighteen inches or two feet in length, came loose, and was laid aside.

Next, Dave reached into the opening, his hand disappearing to his elbow, or above. After groping about for a few minutes in the space beneath the floor, his hand was withdrawn and thrust into his pocket, from which he took a tubular flash light.

Having turned on the light and fixed it so that it would continue to burn, without the necessity for keeping his hand on the button, he lowered the torch into the aperture, and, getting down until he could lay flat, pressed his face to the opening.

"Great Scott!" thought Judson. "At some time or other he must have cut through the lath of the ceiling below. Now he's made a hole through the paper, and is looking down into the apartment underneath, with the help of that light. I certainly came at the right time."

CHAPTER XXXV.

DAVE AND THE PASTEBOARD CYLINDER.

THERE could be no doubt that Frank Judson was right.

No other explanation covered the ground. It was obvious that considerable preliminary work had been done at some time, and that only the paper of the ceiling on the room below had remained intact. Evidently that, too, had now been penetrated, for Dave had had his knife in his hand when he first reached down under the floor. Moreover, if he had not made an opening into the room below, he would have had no use for the flash light.

It went without saying that he had

found the room dark, and was endeavoring to see if the bed was occupied. It was strange that he had chosen to make the investigation so early, but it might be that he had expected Downs to be tired from his journey and to seek rest at an unusual hour.

A chill ran along Judson's spine as he realized that the room directly beneath must be that which Downs was expected to occupy, and therefore the one in which Troutman was now being held much against his will.

"Thank Heaven, I came up here!" the young detective said to himself. "The chief had an idea that Troutman would be safe for hours yet—aside from the rascal's own fears. Apparently, he was mistaken, though, and if it was not possible for me to block this chap's game, there might be a murder committed in the next few minutes."

But what did Dave Hand have in mind? That was as yet by no means clear to the watcher. It was plain that the cylindrical contrivance was to be made use of in some way, but its appearance was totally unfamiliar to the young detective, and he could not imagine what its nature might be.

The care with which David had moved it and placed it against the wall suggested explosives, but the composition of the outer case, and the evident lightness of the object seemed to be enough to turn that theory out of court.

Neither was it a firearm, nor any weapon of that sort. It might possibly be a blowpipe of some kind wrapped up, but that idea did not commend itself to Judson's mind. In fact, he was obliged to give it up, for the time being, and to watch for further enlightenment.

Apparently satisfied at length, the big figure straightened up and rose to its feet. By staring steadily at the man's reflection now, Judson was able to catch glints of light in the mirror, reflecting curiously enough big drops of sweat which stood out on Dave's forehead.

Besides, there could be no question as to Hand's expression at that stage. His features did not register cowardice, but their expression betokened horror, loathing, and fear.

Judson knew that Dave Hand was about to perform some task which he had undertaken to do, but which went counter to every instinct of his nature.

Believing that Archer C. Downs had returned from Florida, and had retired early in the room below, he was prepared to take the life of the man on the bed—to take it in some unusual, diabolically ingenious way.

Judson would have given anything to have been able to communicate with his chief at that moment, or to send Dave Hand into insensibility. The first was out of the question, however; and so was the second, for that matter. In the first place, even if he could have accomplished it, the act would have been premature, for Dave's purpose was not yet clear, except in a general way. In the second place, such a result could not have been brought about under the circumstances, unless by a lucky shot that would rob the man of his senses without wounding him fatally.

For it must be remembered that Judson was under the bed, and within a few feet of Dave. He could not have crawled out of his retreat without being heard and pounced upon before he was ready to defend himself to the best advantage.

The inaction and suspense were growing unbearable, but the vigilant detective felt obliged to "hold the pose" for a while longer.

Meanwhile, Dave had picked up the cylinder once more, whereupon the watcher's muscles grew more tense. Until then he had hoped against hope that Flint had removed Troutman from the bedroom underneath, but now Dave's behavior told him that Downs'

rascally stepson was still below, for if such were not the case, Hand would have delayed operations.

Apparently, Dave had ascertained by means of the searchlight that the bed was occupied. Possibly, he had played the light only over the lower part of the bed, avoiding the occupant's face, for fear of waking him up. Or it might be that the light had not been powerful enough at that distance to reveal the fact that it was not Downs.

As for Troutman's continued presence in the bedroom, that was another puzzle. Judson knew that his chief had expected to visit the man again immediately after his own departure, but it looked as if the detective had been prevented from doing so.

Dave had replaced the section of board, without fitting it perfectly into the space it had occupied. Obviously, it was only a temporary expedient, due to his desire to shut out the light of the room from that below. If nothing else, the action promised a brief delay, which might offer Judson an opportunity of some sort.

"If the fellow would only leave the room for a few moments," he thought, "I might be able to get out of here and hide behind the door. Then I could knock him on the head as he came back, or get the drop on him, and make him surrender. Why doesn't he give me a show?"

But Dave Hand seemed to have no intention. Having possessed himself of the cylinder again, he opened the wardrobe and took from the bottom of it a small alcohol lamp. This he lighted and set on a chair.

"What the dickens is coming next?" Judson asked himself, but found no answer to his mental question.

Dave made the next move almost immediately, but the young detective was as puzzled as before. Hand held the cylinder well above the flame, turning it about and feeling it from time to time—the lower end particularly.

"Warming the contents," Flint's assistant decided; "but that doesn't tell me anything. It might be anything, from soup to dynamite—for they have to thaw out the latter on occasion."

Dave was nearer to him now, and Judson made up his mind that the tube was of heavy cardboard covered with paper. The lower end was closed, but the upper end seemed to be open. From the fact that Dave did not once look into it, however, Judson reasoned that the open end was a sort of blind, and that there was a rail on top as well as the bottom of the tube, but that the top was set in some distance from the end, leaving a few inches of the tube open to the eye.

Presently, as the lower end of the cylinder—which was about two and a half inches wide by nine or ten long—grew warmer, Dave Hand surprised the watcher by ceasing to feel it, and putting his ear close to it instead.

"For the love of Mike!" Judson ejaculated inwardly. "If he isn't listening, I'll eat my hat! What in thunder does he expect to hear? What's in the infernal contrivance, anyway?"

To be concluded in the next issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, out next Tuesday, on April 30th. Do not forget that the magazine is published every week, and that you will not have to wait long for the final installment of this story.

A Question of Diagnosis

by Scott Campbell

Author of "The Cause Invisible," "Under Oath," "In the Scales," etc.

DOCTOR DAVID TRENT, the eminent Philadelphia chemist and bacteriologist, glanced at a card brought in by his stenographer. His desk, in a private library adjoining his spacious laboratories, was covered with important papers—a voluminous correspondence, laboratory reports, chemical analyses for Federal and State commissions, for medical journals, for private corporations, and one involving life itself, relating to a murder trial in which his findings and expert testimony were absolute and final, as far as they went.

For Doctor David Trent was a recognized authority in all such matters. He occupied the very front rank of his profession. His frequent intimate relations with the police and judiciary in many localities, moreover, had thrust upon him considerable distinction as a criminologist and detective, to which he laid not the slightest claim, yet which pleased him to an extent that, under really serious circumstances, he felt constrained to make good.

"Miss Julia Dayne," he muttered, not recalling the name. "Do please favor me—humph! What type of woman, Miss Martin?" He glanced quickly at his waiting stenographer.

"A girlish woman, Mr. Trent, very dainty and very pretty," she informed him demurely.

"Ah!" Trent smiled oddly. "One woman commends another, eh? Let her come in, then, and—wait!" He turned and hurriedly signed a letter and two laboratory reports. "Mail these at once, special delivery, to Doctor Philip Kibby, Wilmington. See that they go at once. They are very important. Yes, yes, let her come in. I'll see what she wants."

Doctor Trent picked up the card again, as his stenographer withdrew to forward the important papers. He was a clean-cut, keen-eyed man of thirty-five, set up like an athlete—a forceful and impressive type. He gazed more sharply at the card, muttering quickly:

"From Wilmington, eh? I failed to notice that. It may be only a coincidence, however, and not have any bearing on——"

He broke off abruptly, rising to place a chair for Miss Julia Dayne, who was then entering. She was a fair, strikingly pretty girl of twenty, with a slender, graceful figure, clad in a tailor-made suit of dark broadcloth, the somber hue of which, with her dark hat and veil, accentuated her paleness and the look of anxiety in her large blue eyes. She entered quite timidly, and appeared somewhat agitated.

"Sit down, Miss Dayne, and be at ease," Trent said kindly, placing her chair near his own. "I see you are a

bit nervous and disturbed. Can I help you in any way? You think so, I imagine; or you would not be here," he added, smiling agreeably.

"I hope so, Doctor Trent, at least," she replied, gazing at him. "I have called to consult you on a very strange and delicate matter. It is very good of you to see me, sir, and to speak so kindly," she gratefully added.

"Pshaw!" Trent laughed lightly. "I am very willing to see you. I will be glad, too, if I can be of any service to you. Speak your mind freely—confidentially, if you like. What's it all about, Miss Dayne?"

"It's about the very strange illness of my foster mother, who adopted me in childhood, and to whom I am deeply devoted," Julia earnestly informed him. "I have come secretly from Wilmington, Doctor Trent, solely to consult you. For I have heard auntie, as I have always called her, speak very highly of you, and I think you will appreciate my feelings, or possibly share my misgivings, and will either advise or aid me. For she now is near death's door, or appears to be, the victim of what seems to me a most extraordinary malady. You must have heard of her, Doctor Trent, at least—Doctor Esther Amadon."

Trent had more than merely heard of her. He knew, in fact, that she had been a very successful physician, that for several years she had been the government bacteriologist for one of the Middle States, later devoting herself chiefly to woman's hygiene, on which she had lectured extensively, and that for the past ten years she had been noted as a cancer specialist and an enthusiastic vivisectionist, confining herself almost exclusively to her laboratory work. Her discoveries and contributions to the medical journals had made her famous both at home and abroad.

Trent long had known of and admired her, in fact, and his interest was obvious the moment he heard the name of the noted specialist, then a woman well advanced into the fifties.

"Goodness!" he exclaimed. "Are you so closely related to Doctor Amadon? I have met her on several occasions. We both are deeply interested in bacteriology. I will be glad, indeed, if I can aid you."

"She adopted me when I was five years old, at the time my mother died," said Julia. "They were very dear friends, and Doctor Amadon has since been a mother to me."

"She never married, I believe."

"No, sir. She has devoted all her life to her profession."

"How long has she been ill? I have not read of it in the papers."

"It has not been reported, not the fact that she is seriously ill," Julia explained. "We have been hoping for a favorable turn. But I—I am losing all hope," she added, her voice faltering.

Trent eyed her more intently. He saw that she was deeply distressed. Her soft blue eyes were moist and her lips quivering. He questioned her more earnestly, wondering at her coming to him for advice and aid.

"How long has Doctor Amadon been ill?" he inquired.

"Five days," said Julia. "I first noticed her abnormal condition last Monday."

"What do you mean by abnormal condition?"

"Well, sir, she appeared, in perfect health early in the day. Late in the afternoon, however, I noticed that she was strangely dazed and uncertain, that her articulation was affected, that she talked incoherently, and seemed to be in a sort of mental stupor, which she threw off only with an effort. Strange to say, she did not seem to realize it."

"How had she been engaged during that day?"

"She was busy in her laboratory, as usual."

"Did she complain of any illness?"

"None whatever."

"Or the next day?"

"At no time, Doctor Trent," said Julia. "That is one of the strange features of the case, one that has aroused my suspicion. I saw on Tuesday that she was even more unnatural. She persisted in her customary work, however, and late in the afternoon I found her unconscious on a couch in the laboratory."

"Hm!" Trent murmured. "That does seem strange, indeed."

"It was impossible to arouse her," Miss Dayne continued. "Since then she has been steadily sinking, becoming more and more lethargic, until this morning she is lying apparently in a state of coma. She seems to be nearing her end. She revived a little on Wednesday morning, sufficiently to recognize me, but could not talk coherently. Since then she has been constantly in this abnormal stupor. The physicians are mystified. They cannot diagnose the case. No treatment appears in any way effective. They——"

"Stop a moment." Trent's brows had been knitting ominously. "You say, Miss Dayne, that there has been no ordinary illness, no sudden shock, no nausea, no local pains, nor anything of the kind."

"No, nothing of the kind."

"Had she been experimenting in her laboratory daily, Miss Dayne, previous to this strange affliction?"

"She had, sir. She has spent most of her time in the laboratory for several years. She has given up practice except in a few cancer cases."

"She keeps numerous animals, no doubt, for vivisection and scientific experiments."

"Yes, indeed."

"She may have become infected, then, or unconsciously inoculated with poisons which——"

"Doctor Kibby, who has had charge of the case since Wednesday, is not of that opinion," Miss Dayne interposed. "Yesterday, nevertheless, he took a sample of her blood for chemical analysis. I do not yet know the result."

"I do," said Trent tersely. "The sample was sent to me for analysis. The name of the subject, however, was not mentioned. I had no idea it was Doctor Esther Amadon."

"But the result?" questioned Julia anxiously.

"Negative, most decidedly, in every way," Trent hastened to assure her. "I have just sent my reports to Doctor Kibby. There is no blood infection, absolutely no trace of poison, no anæmic condition, nor any evidence of disease. On the contrary, Miss Dayne, the blood appears remarkably healthy."

"Auntie has always enjoyed good health," replied Julia. "I never have known her to have a sick day."

"There is absolutely no trace of anything wrong," Trent added. "Doctor Kibby is sure, of course, that there is no organic disease?" he added inquiringly.

"He cannot detect any, Mr. Trent, nor can the three physicians whom he called yesterday in consultation. They are completely mystified. They——"

"One moment." Trent checked her quite abruptly, drawing forward in his chair. "Do you know, Miss Dayne, to what suspicion such a case as this sometimes gives rise?" he inquired.

"I think I do, Mr. Trent."

"That there may be some extraneous cause, that the extraordinary condition may be due to knavery, to deviltry of some kind? Have you thought of that?"

"I have thought of it."

"Is that why you have called on me?"

"That is precisely why," said Julia Dayne. "I thought you would be more likely to agree with me, to suspect something of the kind, and to aid me

perhaps, than the other physicians. I implore you to do so, Mr. Trent, if you are really of that opinion," she added, with pathetic fervor.

Doctor Trent did not reply for a moment. He glanced at the pile of papers on his desk, then at the pale, appealing face of the anxious girl. He knew, as she had intimated, that physicians are slow to suspect and seek crime in such cases, and he thought again of the famous specialist said to be at death's door. The spur of the criminologist, an inherent detective instinct, urged him on.

"Have you any definite suspicion?" he asked quite abruptly.

"Only what I have stated," said Julia.

"Is Doctor Amadon wealthy?"

"Quite so. She has about half a million, I believe."

"Any family except yourself?"

"Only her nephew, Fiske Moran, whom she has cared for since boyhood. He now is twenty-five, and is as devoted to her as I am. We have grown up together under her care."

"Have you told him your misgivings?" Trent's eyes narrowed slightly.

"I only hinted at them," said Julia. "I saw at once that he would consider them absurd."

"What is his occupation or business?"

"He is not in business. He looks after auntie's mail and assists her in the laboratory. I take care of the house, with the help of two servants."

"Have you confided in any one except me?"

"No, sir. I came here secretly to consult you."

"Can you return without your mission being suspected?"

"Yes, indeed," said Julia. "I can explain my absence in some conventional way."

"Do so, then." Trent arose abruptly and closed his desk. "I'll go with you to Wilmington. I will talk with Doctor Kibby, and I may call at your home with him. In that case, Miss Dayne, you must not betray that we have met, nor that I have any covert mission. We have just time to hit the eleven o'clock express."

II.

It was about noon when Doctor David Trent arrived in Wilmington, having parted with Julia Dayne before leaving the train. He had reasons for the circumspect course he was shaping. He realized that he might be wrong, might blunder badly, and that the case was one to be handled with gloves.

Assuming that he was right, moreover, that the strange illness of Doctor Esther Amadon was due to knavery and criminal design, the questions that arose were not easily answered. How and by what means was it accomplished, to begin with, in so crafty a way as to completely mystify the physicians and hide every trace of the cause? Who was the knave capable of such subtle deviltry? What was the motive, the end to be attained?

Trent reasoned, of course, that Doctor Amadon's large fortune might be the incentive, and that the culprit was one who would inherit part of it. There seemed to be only two presumable heirs, her adopted daughter and her nephew, Fiske Moran. Trent felt sure that the girl was above suspicion, but he knew nothing about Moran. Assuming him guilty, how was the fact to be proved, the means discovered, and the culmination of his knavery prevented?

These were some of the questions and contingencies confronting him, when Trent called on Doctor Philip Kibby at noon that day, just as the latter had finished reading his letter and laboratory reports, received by mail only a short time before.

"Well, well, you come close on the heels of your special delivery," said the

physician, after their greeting. "You might have brought it, Trent, instead of sending it."

"I had other business in Wilmington, doctor, and was not sure I would have time to call on you," Trent replied evasively. "I have heard, however, that Doctor Amadon is seriously ill, and that you have the case. We are old friends, and I feel anxious about her."

"There is cause for anxiety," Doctor Kibby said gravely. "I can see no hope for her. The analyses obtained from you relate to her case."

"I inferred so."

"As I expected, however, they are absolutely negative," added the physician. "Really, Trent, it is a most mysterious case. I never knew the like. Doctor Amadon has always been a strong, vigorous woman, and I cannot account for this sudden, singular illness. There is no infection, and I cannot detect any organic trouble. It is not the effect of a shock, or a brain hemorrhage, for symptoms invariable in such cases are entirely lacking. She seems, in fact, in spite of all we can do, to be sinking into a stupor that must end in death. I can neither discover nor conceive of any cause for it."

"Has it occurred to you, Kibby, that the cause may be outside?" Trent pointedly questioned.

"Outside?" Kibby gazed at him sharply. "What do you mean?"

"Bluntly stated, doctor, that some one is craftily killing her."

"Good heavens! I cannot believe that. There is absolutely no evidence of it."

"None, you mean, that you have found," Trent dryly corrected.

"But who would commit such a crime? How could one commit it? In what way, Trent, and by what means?"

"Those are open questions, Doctor Kibby, which——"

"Which seem to me entirely irrelevant," declared the physician, interrupting. "There are no reasonable grounds for your suspicion. Only an autopsy, if she dies, will reveal the cause of Esther Amadon's death."

"That will be a little late to do her any good," Trent said dryly. "Are you aware, Doctor Kibby, that she is worth half a million?" he demanded, much more impressively. "That's a whole lot of money. Murder is often committed for a much smaller wad, both in high life and low. Do you know who will benefit from her death?"

"Chiefly her nephew, Fiske Moran, and her adopted daughter," Doctor Kibby informed him. "Both are very devoted to her. Neither would even consider such a heinous crime, much less commit it. I'm sure of that, absolutely sure of it. Your suspicion, Trent, has not feet to stand on."

"Nevertheless, Kibby, I want to visit the Amadon residence and see what I can learn."

"Do you expect to learn more than the four experienced physicians who have thoroughly studied the case?" Doctor Kibby inquired, with some sarcasm.

"Well, I can learn no less, doctor, surely," Trent retorted, smiling. "You can easily aid me. Being all at sea yourself, as you admit, you should be very willing to do so. You may state that you want me to study the case and note the effect of certain chemicals. Not that I will administer any, mind you, but it will serve as a blind, as I wish to remain there for a time. Come, come, what do you say?"

"I would say no, Trent, absolutely, if you were a less keen and capable man," replied the physician. "Under the circumstances, however, and in view of your wisdom and discrimination—well, I can see no harm in it."

"Very good," Trent approved. "We will go immediately, then, since de-

lays are dangerous. By the way, Kibby, is there a nurse on the case?"

"Yes, since Wednesday."

"One you recommended?"

"No. She was there when I was called. I think Moran sent to Philadelphia for her. She appears to be all right."

"No doubt," Trent agreed, as they prepared to leave. "What do you know about Moran? Anything unfavorable?"

"No, nothing to his discredit. If he has any bad habits, or is in any way off color, he is clever enough to conceal it. I really feel, Trent, that your suspicion is quite absurd."

"Do not mention it, nevertheless, or hint at any covert mission," Trent pointedly cautioned. "Let it appear to be only what I have suggested."

"I understand," Doctor Kibby nodded, as they walked out to his garage.

A brief ride brought them to the home of Doctor Esther Amadon, a fine wooden dwelling in a very attractive residential quarter. It occupied a corner estate of considerable size, with a broad avenue in front and a quiet side street, with well-kept grounds, a few fine old shade trees, and a garage in the rear.

A servant admitted them. Almost immediately, however, there came from the library a stalwart, florid man of twenty-five, with broad shoulders and a large head, with wavy brown hair, a smooth-shaved, quite attractive face, but which suggested a somewhat weak and indolent nature, rather than manly force and strength of character. He wore a loose velvet house jacket, and was smoking a cigarette.

"Ah, here again, doctor?" he queried carelessly, regarding Trent a bit sharply while he approached. "I was not expecting you so soon. There has been no observable change in your patient since morning, the nurse has just informed me."

"I will see her presently," Doctor Kibby replied. "I want Doctor Trent to see her, also. He is from Philadelphia, and has consented to aid me. This is Mr. Moran, doctor, of whom I told you."

"Ah, yes!" Trent smiled, extending his hand. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Moran."

"Same to you, sir," Moran said cordially, but his mottled gray eyes had a searching scrutiny. "Anything you can do for my dear aunt will, I assure you, be deeply appreciated."

"Doctor Kibby has told me of the strange case," Trent responded, more seriously.

"Strange, doctor, indeed!" Moran shook his head somberly. "We have about given up hope of her recovery. Still, while there's life—— Ah, here is Miss Dayne, my cousin. Doctor Trent, Julia, dear, from Philadelphia. Doctor Kibby has brought him here for a consultation."

Miss Dayne had approached while they were speaking. She acknowledged the introduction, but greeted Mr. Trent without a sign of recognition, and for several moments they talked along conventional lines in the broad, handsomely furnished hall. Doctor Kibby, with a nod to Trent, then conducted him up to a large front chamber in which his patient was lying.

Trent glanced with apparent indifference at the nurse, who arose from a chair near the bed when they entered. She was a very handsome girl around twenty, a pronounced brunette, with strong, regular features, a velvety complexion, full red lips, and eyes like pools of liquid light. Trent had a vague impression that he had seen her before, but he could not then recall when and where. He merely bowed when his companion introduced her as Miss Norton.

"There is no change, Doctor Kibby, since you were here," she said quietly,

smoothing her white apron. "She seems, if anything, a little weaker."

"I want Doctor Trent to examine her," Kibby replied. "He may remain to note the effect of what he will perhaps decide to administer."

"Very well, sir."

"It may not be perceptible for several hours. I will ring when we want you," Kibby added, noting a significant glance from the chemist.

Miss Norton bowed and withdrew, quietly closing the door, but not without an intense, lingering stare at the stranger.

Trent then was standing near the bed, gazing down at the pale, placid face of the unconscious woman. It was a fine, impressive face even in illness and the deathlike repose of utter insensibility; and that of David Trent, while he gazed, hardened ominously, until it looked strangely stern and white in the dim light of the room.

For he was there, not as a physician, but under the spur of distrust, of the criminologist, the detective, the man eager to serve the devoted girl who had appealed to him, and to save, if possible, this splendid, clever woman lying so near death's door.

"Sit down, Kibby, and wait," he said quietly. "I want to look around a bit."

"Go ahead," replied the physician, complying. "Go as far as you like."

Trent tiptoed to the door, listening intently for several moments, until he heard the voice of the nurse in the lower hall. Then, with brows thoughtfully knit, as if he strove to fathom how this crime, if a crime it was, could have had its inception, he gazed for a few moments out of the front windows, then turned to one overlooking the side grounds and roof of a broad veranda.

Observing the latter, he raised the window and looked out. The roof extended to a portico over a side door of the house, over which was the window of a side hall and stairway. He saw how easily one might get from one window to the other, and he leaned out to inspect the roof more carefully.

It was covered with ordinary thick roofing paper, somewhat worn, and on which small patches of tar were here and there exposed. He could discover no footprints, however, and he then examined the stone sill of the window and the casing on each side. He found that the dust on the sill had been recently disturbed, also that, adhering to the casings, as if both had been grasped by some person entering, or gazing through the window.

"It was on Monday, I believe, that her illness first was observed," Trent remarked, as he closed the window.

"Yes. Miss Dayne was the first to notice her abnormal condition," said the physician.

"Has it rained here since Monday?"

"No; we have had no rain for a week. What have you found?"

"Nothing definite," said Trent evasively.

He sat down, glancing at the carpet near the window, and then at a dressing stand near by, on which were the ordinary toilet articles required by a woman. Only one ornament was among them, however, and it caught Trent's eye. It was a small shell barrette, used for confining the back hair, and it was lying alone on a small glass tray.

Presently, Trent saw something more. The light from the window fell directly on the tray. He suddenly noticed that a small part of the glass, that nearest the barrette, had a peculiar violet tinge, so faint that it was hardly perceptible, yet which obviously was foreign to the glass itself.

Aside from a subtle gleam deep down in his thoughtful eyes, Trent's face underwent no change. He arose after a moment, however, and slipped the barette into his pocket, unobserved by the physician.

"I must go a step farther, Kibby," he then said earnestly. "May I use your runabout? I can drive it all right."

"Where are you going?" Kibby gazed at him, wondering.

"Only down to the business district for a few minutes."

"I'm not engaged. I'll drive you down there."

"On the contrary, Kibby, you must wait right here and do what I direct," Trent said impressively. "Do not leave this room, or let any person enter, or look in even, during my absence. To make sure of it, Kibby, lock the door after me. I'll speak to you from the hall when I return. Open the door for no one else."

"Goodness!" Kibby muttered amazedly. "What on earth have you learned so quickly?"

"Don't question me. I'm not yet sure," replied Trent evasively. "Merely do what I have directed. Much may depend on it."

Doctor Kibby consented, of course, and Trent hurriedly departed. He ran upon Fiske Moran and the nurse in the lower hall. They were talking earnestly near the parlor door. Moran left her immediately, however, intercepting Trent, and saying quickly: "Are you off so soon, doctor? Not through with the case, are you?"

"No, indeed." Then paused briefly. "I'm going to a drug store. I shall return very soon."

"What do you make of her illness?"

"I cannot say at present. I will talk with you later."

"Good enough," Moran approved. "Spare no expense, mind you, if anything can be done."

Trent responded with a nod, then hastened out and entered the physician's car. He did not go to a drug store, however. Instead, he entered a leading fancy-goods store, where he succeeded in buying a barrette precisely like that belonging to Esther Amadon.

He then approached the switchboard operator and requested her to get him in touch with the International Radium Supply Company of Pittsburgh, on the long-distance phone.

In due time, he got the connection and conversed with the manager, Mr. Randolph Flood.

III.

Trent returned to the Amadon residence in about twenty minutes. He rejoined Doctor Kibby and learned that no one had attempted to enter the chamber. He then placed on the glass tray the barrette he had purchased.

Doctor Kibby departed ten minutes later, and at the end of a quarter of an hour Trent went down to the library, where Moran, Miss Dayne, and the nurse were awaiting him.

"You may return to your patient, Miss Norton," he directed. "I have administered something that possibly will prove effective. Notify me at once of any change in her condition. I will be here until evening."

"Very well, sir," she replied, rising to go. "Shall I continue Doctor Kibby's medicines?"

"No. Drop them temporarily."

"He said you were trying something else," Moran observed, tossing the end of his cigarette into the fireplace. "I hope it will help her."

"I can tell later, Mr. Moran," Trent replied. "We must wait patiently. I understand, by the way, that Doctor Amadon has a very fine laboratory. I would like to inspect it."

"Sure!" Moran arose quite eagerly. "I'll be glad to show you. There is none better equipped in any of the colleges. Aunt Esther has a reputation, you know, as a cancer specialist. She has spent years in microscopic study and vivisection. Her subjects now on hand, including a couple of small mon-

keys, poor devils, are kept in a shed back of the garage."

"I don't care to see them." Trent smiled significantly. "I would, however, like to view the laboratory."

"Come on," said Moran, drawing up his imposing figure. "It occupies most of the basement. There's a door from outside, but we'll go down from the rear hall."

Trent turned to follow him. As he did so, he slipped a scrap of paper to Miss Dayne, who, lest she might blunder in some way, had said very little since he entered the house. When alone, she read his brief missive:

I must be alone in the laboratory for ten minutes. Invent some plausible reason to call Moran and detain him.

Some of the color faded from the girl's fair cheeks. She wondered whether this signified any suspicion on her cousin. She arose and obeyed a few moments later. Moran, complying readily, left the physician alone in the spacious, finely appointed laboratory.

Trent's air of admiring interest, which he had assumed while talking with Moran, vanished on the instant. He took from a wall cabinet a powerful compound microscope, through which he hastened to inspect the barrette brought from Esther Amadon's chamber. It took him only a few moments. Then, replacing the microscope, he began a hurried search in a waste basket and a box of refuse in one corner. In the latter he found what he was seeking—a few curved bits of broken glass, as if from a slender tube, or a very small phial.

As he turned from the box, Trent made one more discovery. On one of the rounds of a plain wooden chair near the zinc-covered laboratory table, he caught sight of several black stains. A closer inspection showed that they were smutches of tar. Plainly, the marks had come from the shoes of some one seated in the chair, whose feet had been placed on the round.

Trent left the Amadon residence late in the afternoon, stating that he would return in the evening.

Dusk had deepened to darkness when he did so. The hall and lower rooms of the house were brightly lighted. Only a dim glow, however, appeared on the drawn curtains of the sick woman's chamber.

Instead of going to the front door and ringing, Trent stole to the side door, quietly mounted the portico rail, then drew himself noiselessly to the roof of the veranda. Between the curtain and the casing of the side window, he could see part of the bed, the motionless form of the senseless woman, and the nurse in a chair near by.

She was gazing moodily at the floor. Her hands were tightly twined together on her lap. Her heavy brows were darkly knit over her intense black eyes. Her mouth had a downward slant, evincing the sinister nature of her thoughts. Trent could see the dressing stand also, and the glass tray, but the barrette he had substituted was gone.

It was eight o'clock when he rang the front-door bell. He was admitted by Fiske Moran, who at once informed him that there still was no change in the patient. Trent appeared oblivious to the subtle satisfaction in his low, sonorous voice.

"It may come later," he replied. "In the meantime, Mr. Moran, I want to ask you a few questions about her daily habits. You assist her in the laboratory, I believe."

"Yes, when needed," Moran nodded. "I also look after her correspondence."

"Let's go down there," Trent suggested. "We can enjoy a smoke and talk without interruptions."

"Surely," Moran assented; "I often go down there for a smoke. Aunt Esther kicks at cigarettes in the library."

Trent did not blame her. He fol-

lowed Moran to the laboratory again, where the latter switched on the electric lights. Then, at Trent's suggestion, he opened the door leading out of doors, for ventilation.

"It will let the smoke out also," Trent added, as they sat down near the table. "By the way, Moran, you're quite a rugged chap. How much do you weigh?"

"About two hundred," said Moran, lighting a cigarette.

"I'd have set you above that, even," commented Trent. "You look heavier. I suppose the nurse, Miss Norton, is with your aunt this evening."

"Yes, certainly. She looks after her during the night."

"Very properly. By the way, where did you get her?" Trent added carelessly. "She's a very attractive girl."

"She lives in Philadelphia."

"H'm, is that so?" Trent queried. "Has she a twin sister? I've seen a cabaret singer there who closely resembles her."

"She does a little singing, Doctor Trent, when not otherwise employed." Moran gazed at him rather nervously. "She's not always on a case, you know. You very likely have heard her. She's a very capable nurse, all right."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Trent. "She certainly appears to be. Regarding your aunt, now. She confines her practice entirely to cancer cases, doesn't she?"

"Almost entirely," said Moran, with steadfast scrutiny. "Why do you ask?"

"I wondered how many patients she has."

"About a dozen just at present, I think."

"Quite a number," Trent observed. "Radium, by the way, is now quite generally used in cancer cases. That's powerful stuff, Moran, and in inexperienced hands very dangerous. The power of radium emanations is almost inconceivable, in fact, and is only partly understood. Moderate exposure to it, even, may cause terrible injury, or death itself. Dangerous stuff, Moran, indeed! You handle your aunt's correspondence. Has she been in the habit of buying or renting radium for use in her cancer cases?"

Moran had been steadily losing color while the chemist was speaking. The florid hue had entirely left his cheeks. His lips were taking on the gray tinge of dead ashes. His eyes began to emit a threatening gleam and glitter, however, that should have warned one of what he was capable. He flicked the ashes from his cigarette, replying readily, yet a bit coldly:

"Yes, she has used radium, I think, in some cases."

"Recently?" inquired Trent carelessly.

"I cannot say how recently."

"You don't know of any, then, that she has lately received?"

"I do not," said Moran, his voice hardening. "But suppose she has. What of it?"

"It's dangerous stuff, Moran," Trent repeated. "She may have been affected by it. Thinking that might be the cause of her illness, and knowing her credit to be good for any reasonable amount of it, I have telephoned to the supply company from which she would be most likely to rent it, very few persons buying radium outright in any quantity. I have learned, Moran, that a very costly radium ampul was sent to her by express last Friday. Do you know whether she received it?"

"I do not," said Moran, lips twitching. "I know nothing about it."

"I have learned, nevertheless, that it was delivered here on Saturday, and that the return receipt bears her name and your initials."

"What do you mean?" Moran lurched forward, scowling resentfully. "What do you imply by that?"

"Nothing," Trent said tersely. "It doesn't follow, if you did receive the express package, Moran, that you knew it contained a radium ampul. You must have received it, in fact, since you signed for it in her name. Don't you recall it?"

"I do, Trent, now that you remind me, and put it in that way," Moran admitted, with an obvious effort to pull himself together. "It came Saturday afternoon. I had no idea, however, what it contained."

"What did you do with it?" Trent inquired.

"I'm not sure," said Moran. "I may have handed it to my aunt, or put it on her desk. I do not remember."

"She said nothing to you about it later?"

"Not a word. I'm sure she must have found it, all right."

"Some one did," Trent said pointedly. "I'm sure of that."

"You are, eh? Why so?"

"Because in the refuse box yonder, Moran, are the bits of glass from the end of the opened ampul. I made it a point to search for them."

"You did, eh?" Moran was ghastly white, but his voice was hard. He inhaled deeply from his cigarette, blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling, then threw the stub on the floor. "My aunt, then, must have put them there," he declared. "She must have opened the ampul. What led you, Trent, to make a search?"

"I'll tell you what," Trent replied. He had worked upon his hearer's nerves until he felt sure the fellow would collapse under an accusation. "When in your aunt's chamber, Moran, I noticed that a small glass tray on her dressing stand had a faint violet tinge. Radium near glass, Moran, imparts that hue to it."

"Well, what of it?" Moran demanded, his voice half in his throat.

"I'll tell you what," Trent repeated. "Knowing to what foul uses radium may be turned, and knowing that, if applied for a time near the base of the skull, its emanations soon will affect the brain, causing paralysis, insensibility, and finally death itself—knowing all this, Moran, I was led to examine a small barrette that was lying on the tray."

"Barrette!" Moran, his jaw falling, swayed heavily in his chair.

"Here it is!" cried Trent, displaying it.

Moran stared at it wildly. "What, then, is—is——"

"Oh, I have substituted another, a harmless one, for your cabaret singer from Philadelphia to keep back of your aunt's head when alone with her."

"Curse you!" Moran, his eyes glaring, vented a snarl like that of a beast at bay. "Do you—do you mean——"

"I mean just what I say," Trent cut in, with sudden, terrible severity. "You—you, Moran, are responsible for your aunt's condition. You intercepted the radium ampul. You entered the window of her room on Sunday night to get the barrette she habitually wears. You brought it here, bored a tiny hole for the atom of radium, both easily seen with a microscope, and then you replaced the barrette, knowing that she would wear it unsuspiciously. The radium began to affect her on Monday. On Tuesday it overcame her. On Wednesday you brought that girl here to pose as a nurse and aid you. You have done this through love for her, Moran, and taken the quick road to secure your share of your aunt's fortune. You——"

Trent, overwhelming in his denunciation, was interrupted by a sudden piercing scream on the night air. He started up, crying quickly:

"Just so! Your nurse, Moran, has become alarmed and would have fled.

She has been stopped by the police, who are watching the house. She—here, not that, you cur!"

Moran, with every ghastly feature distorted, had leaped up and was drawing a revolver. Trent reached him with a single bound, grappling with him and uttering a shout that almost instantly brought Doctor Kibby and two Wilmington detectives through the open door—opened only that they might overhear all that had been said.

Moran was as strong as a bull, and he fought with utter desperation, trying vainly to turn his weapon on himself; but he was finally overcome and handcuffed, when he collapsed completely and admitted all that the keen and clever chemist had alleged.

"Knowing Doctor Amadon to be a cancer specialist, and that radium rays might cause just such conditions as Miss Dayne described, I decided to look into the case," Trent explained a little later while with Julia Dayne and Doctor Kibby in the library. "I had to be a bit circumspect, however, to make sure the nurse knew just what she was doing. I had no doubt of it, of course, when I found that she had replaced the barrette back of your aunt's head during my absence. But you, Miss Dayne, must not be too depressed by all this. Doctor Amadon will finally recover, now that the cause is removed. She probably will not prosecute Moran, but will send him into the world to shift for himself. That possibly will make a man of him. Regarding the atom of radium, which is worth some few thousands, I will have it safely returned to the company."

It was a very grateful girl, though one bowed with grief, who bade Doctor David Trent farewell at the door later that evening.

BALTIMORE UNEARTHS GIGANTIC STOCK SWINDLE

THE offices of John Herck & Co., stockbrokers, on the seventh floor of the Munsey Building, in Baltimore, Maryland, were raided one morning recently by a squad of headquarters' detectives, and eight men and one woman employee of the firm were arrested, charged with participation in what is alleged to be one of the most gigantic stock-manipulation schemes uncovered in years. The detectives secured several wagonloads of records, papers, and letters, which contain valuable evidence.

The house of John Herck & Co., which is advertised as a stock brokerage and promoting institution, has main offices at No. 4 Exchange Place, New York, and also a branch in Philadelphia. Through the alleged schemes of this concern the detectives said many Baltimoreans have been fleeced out of thousands of dollars since last December, when the company began its operations.

The grand jury returned six indictments, alleging conspiracy to defraud. Three of those under indictment were caught in the raid, while the others were said to be out of town.

The company deals in stock of the Lost City Oil and Gas Corporation, and in one of the statements in the hands of the police claimed to carry on a business amounting to $25,000,000 a year.

It is said that the concern sold stock in Baltimore, New York, and other places, and made its own market. While the general report to prospective clients was that the stock was valued at twenty-five cents a share, the expected investors were told it was constantly going up, and that it would reach two dollars within a few days.

Little Miss Housebreaker

by James W. Egan

Author of "Playing Both Ends," "How the Joker Ran Wild," "Coffee and——" etc.

THE thick-set man across the aisle smiled at me, possibly because I had been smiling when his eyes first alighted upon me; but I had not been smiling at him, so I made no response to his half-leer. I knew him, even if he did not know me, and there was nothing about his huge, coarse self that appealed to me.

My smile, in the first place, had been caused by a conversation between two men seated in front of me. I take the liberty of recording as much as I heard of what they said, for it has an important bearing on the matter that I am about to relate.

"This fellow seems to have the police all at sea," said one of the men.

"They are a pack of boneheads, anyhow!" growled his seat mate.

"The worst of it is that the rascal actually laughs at them!" asserted the first speaker. "Even that name he uses—'Kid Kidder'—is probably assumed to make them look ridiculous."

"Can you imagine a police force that lets a burglar pull off stunts under their very noses, and then write letters to the papers about it, kidding the cops!" said the other, in deep disgust. "It's certainly the limit. We need some men in that department who can do things, I tell you!"

I smiled at their words because I wondered what they would say or do if they knew the individual who was at present baffling Amoca' policemen and newspapers was sitting unconcernedly behind them. I wondered what the thick-set individual, who happened to be of the embarrassed police force, would do if my identity were suddenly revealed.

However, I had small fear of discovery. Every one in Amoca thought that the mysterious Kid Kidder was a clever gentleman burglar, uncannily skillful at covering his tracks. They had no reason to suspect that this robber humorist was a girl of twenty, very popular in society circles, and the heiress to a number of millions.

Yet I, Marilynn Thurston Drew, petted débutante, with everything money could buy, had deliberately chosen to risk my name and my neck in stealing other people's goods and holding the officers of the law up to ridicule.

Why I did it, I do not know. The love of excitement and danger is in my blood. Society, with its usages and insufferable boredom, had come near to driving me mad. I wanted thrills, new sensations. So I became a burglar, and, to make the game more hazardous and alluring, I would send a letter to the newspapers after every escapade, ironically laughing at the police. Al-

ready I had committed six robberies without disaster, and the disciples of law and order were goaded up to a high pitch. The entire city was laughing at them.

The realization that I, slender, supposedly weak, feminine creature, was responsible for this, gave me an intoxicating thrill. I had never been so happy in all my life. Of course, the money and jewels I stole were nothing to me. I had them cached safely away. I thought that I might some day return them to the owners. I cared little about the stuff. It was the delightful thrill of the game I wanted.

I had purposely taken a street car this day to overhear what people were saying about Kid Kidder. Apparently my exploits were on the tip of every tongue. It was a strange and delightful sensation.

The thick-set man left the car a mile this side of my country home, leering at me again as he heavy-footed it to the rear. I stared coldly at him. Three nights before we had met under far different circumstances, but I knew he did not appreciate this fact. He was reputed one of the best plain-clothes men in the State, but I scorned him as a coarse, brutal blunderer, who had gained his reputation by browbeating unfortunate offenders who had fallen into his clutches. I was confident that no one of his stripe would ever lay me by the heels.

Alighting at the little country station just outside the grounds of our rather rambling place, I walked briskly the quarter mile to the house. On arriving, I immediately sought my apartments, for I intended to make a foray this very evening.

Mignon, the maid, brought me the evening papers, and I picked them up to see what was being said about me. Kid Kidder was usually a front-page attraction.

As I had expected, my past performances were the object of considerable comment; but a long story in one of the sheets instantly aroused my interest. In large headlines it was announced that the police were weary of being laughed at, and were going to put a stop to Kid Kidder's depredations. With this object in view, the police department had wired East for Locksley Darrell, one of the leading criminal investigators of the United States, and he was reported to have arrived in Amoca, although no official information was being vouchsafed.

I read the article with a good deal of interest, as can be imagined, but I did not feel greatly worried. Darrell was probably a very clever man, if all that was said about him were true, but I had an idea I could cope with him.

I dined early that evening—and alone. Neither father nor mother was present. They rarely appeared at any meal. My parents cared for nothing outside of the world of business and bridge. They never had time for things that make a real home. Possibly that was one reason I had become the unconventional creature I now was.

All through the meal I was thinking of the Burbecker ball. I was to attend this society event as a guest—but that wasn't all I had planned to do. I wanted the famous Burbecker Idol—the most talked-of jewel in America. A wonderful topaz had been brought from Tibet by Burbecker a few weeks before, the stone cleverly carved into a tiny idol. It was an uncannily marvelous piece of work. I could imagine the sensation its disappearance would create.

Leaving my home shortly after eight o'clock that evening, at the wheel of my own roadster, I had decided upon my plan of action. If everything worked out favorably, I would have the idol before midnight.

Amoca society was out in force, for the Burbecker ball was a distinct social

event. Among the throngs that moved within, and out upon the lawn—for it was a mild and beautiful evening out of doors—were three or four bulky individuals more at home in blue cloth and brass buttons than evening clothes; keeping an eye open for Kid Kidder, I presumed. The thick-set person of the leering smile was one of them. I wondered if Mr. Darrell was present. I hoped so. I wanted to hold him up to ridicule in my next letters to the newspapers.

Tiring of the crush in the ballroom, I had stepped out on the veranda for a moment when Mrs. Burbecker pounced upon me.

"Dear Miss Drew," she gushed, "I want you to meet Mr. Harold Blake. He is manager of the great new steel plant that is building across the river. He wants to dance with you, my dear."

She hurried away, giving us one of her smirking smiles. Mr. Harold Blake was a young and decidedly good-looking chap of about thirty, and I acknowledged the introduction with a little more warmth than I might have under other circumstances.

"Let's stay out here, Miss Drew," he said. "I wanted to meet you and talk to you, but not in that mob. I told our kind hostess I was seeking a dance in order to get the introduction. I have been wanting to chat with you all evening. You will not think me unduly forward, if I say I have had eyes for none but you, since your arrival."

"You flatter me," I laughed. "You like to say pretty things, do you not, Mr. Blake?"

"Ah, you wrong me, Miss Drew," he protested. "I am quite sincere. Can't we find some place where we can sit and talk and be at ease?"

Harold Blake seemed to have a compelling way about him. Besides, every girl likes to hear nice speeches about herself, especially from the lips of a handsome young man. So we found a bench together, not too far away from the groups on the lawn.

I found Harold Blake the most interesting young man I had ever conversed with. I experienced the man's subtle attraction. It was a strange, delightful sensation, and I found myself losing my head. The Burbecker idol was nearly driven out of my mind.

I finally brought myself up with a turn. This nonsense must not ruin the plans of Kid Kidder.

"Oh, Mr. Blake," I said, suddenly rising, "you must excuse me. I have been here ever so much longer than I thought, and I'll wager several young men have been hunting for a recreant dancing partner. I'll have to go."

"But I'll see you again this evening?" he said, seeming not any too well pleased.

"That may be," I responded lightly. I didn't think he would. However, I shook hands with him and smiled, then skipped back to the ballroom.

It was not worrying about the young men who "had dances with me," though. I realized the hour was growing late, and it behooved me to busy myself. I maneuvered to get away from the ballroom unobserved, although the officiousness of Gung Dhas, a Hindu servant of the Burbeckers, almost caused me a little annoyance.

I managed to get my car unobserved. Locking myself in—my car had been especially constructed for me—I deftly set to work to change my appearance. When I stepped out again, I was a trim young chauffeur, wearing a roomy cap and a pair of big goggles.

While other girls in my set had been eating fudge and petting puppies, I had been swimming, rowing, and exercising in the gymnasium. Although slender, I was more athletic and strong than many men.

Slipping quietly through the shadows to the rear of the house, I climbed a porch pillar, drew myself upon the

roof, and quietly made my way to an open second-story window. I entered the boudoir of Mrs. Burbecker.

It was currently supposed that the Burbecker jewel was stored in the burglar-proof safe in the library, but I had learned that a concealed wall safe in Mrs. Burbecker's apartments held the precious idol. I had been very fortunate in learning this, and I knew it would make my task easier.

The little wall safe was well hidden, and I spent some time in finding it. I finally stumbled upon it. The rest was easy. Within five minutes I had conquered the combination, and the safe was ready to be opened.

As I was ready to wrench the knob, I heard a footfall. I scampered behind a screen, and drew a small automatic revolver from one of the pockets of my chauffeur's rig.

From my lurking place, I saw a young man, roughly dressed and unshaven, steal quietly in. His eyes fell upon the wall safe, and he stepped eagerly forward.

I acted promptly. Whisking from behind the screen, I trained the automatic on him.

"No foolishness now," I commanded. "Up with your hands. Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"None of your business!" he growled.

I raised my weapon significantly.

"Well, if you must know," he said, "I'm the guy that's been in the papers so much. I'm Kid Kidder. That's me!"

I could not restrain a gasp. Was somebody trading upon my reputation? I felt angry and hurt.

"You are a cheap crook and a bluffer——" I began, when I heard something like a hiss behind me. I turned, to stare into the muzzles of two automatics, held by Gung Dhas, the Hindu servant of the Burbeckers.

"Gung Dhas want idol," he whispered. "Me kill you two, if say word. You go now. Leave Gung Dhas here."

My head was beginning to whirl. Of all the odd experiences that had fallen to my lot since assuming the rôle of Kid Kidder, this was the strangest. I had botched things, and I felt angry and humiliated. Had I not met Harold Blake, I was sure things would have progressed differently. As it was now——

Well, I was in a dilemma, and my situation might become acutely serious at any minute. Still, to be outwitted by this Hindu servant was galling. As I marched slowly toward the window, I was thinking rapidly. The young man who termed himself Kid Kidder slouched along by my side. I was angry and indignant at his use of the name I had made notorious in Amoca. He must be a petty crook with a craving for publicity. There are inhabitants of the underworld who are like that.

I had almost reached the window, and still had seen no way out of the dilemma, when I was given another shock. The evening was proving one surprise after another.

My old friend, the thick-necked plain-clothes man, had arrived on the scene. He thrust his head in at the window and waved a heavy weapon in all our faces. Gung Dhas was close behind the false Kid Kidder and me, and I heard him muttering. What might have happened I do not know, but there was a sudden scuffling sound and a fall. I turned, to see Harold Blake seated comfortably on the chest of Gung Dhas. Where he had come from I had no idea.

"Good work, Mr. Blake," approved the plain-clothes man, who had now climbed into the room from the porch. "A fine round-up seems to have taken place. Here, I'll fix that Hindu baby for you. Put 'em on him."

He tossed Harold Blake a pair of handcuffs. His automatic was still

trained on me and the other burglar. Harold, who had not yet recognized me, secured the wrists of the Hindu, and then arose. For the first time probably he got a good look at me.

He gasped. "Good heavens! Marilynn—Miss Drew!"

I knew his eyes were on the chauffeur outfit, and I felt hot blushes stealing over my cheeks. Unless I lied, I was in a terrible fix. And my lie must be believed.

"Who the devil are these two?" growled the plain-clothes man. "The Hindu I figured on—but this guy and the dame——"

I raised my eyes to those of Harold. He was looking at me, a puzzled expression upon his face. Moistening my lips, I spoke.

"I—I have a confession to make," I faltered.

"I guess you have," leered the plain-clothes person.

"Never mind—let her speak," said Harold Blake, in tones of authority. "Go on, Miss Drew," he added, a different note in his voice.

"I have been very foolish and reckless," I declared. "It happened, quite by accident, that I overheard a telephone conversation between one of our chauffeurs and somebody unknown. The nature of it provoked my interest. A reference was made to the Burbecker jewel, and I gathered the impression that the mysterious Kid Kidder was a confederate of this chauffeur."

"H'm!" observed the plain-clothes individual.

"After he had telephoned, the chauffeur somehow suspected that he had been overheard, and he left rather suddenly. A daring and foolish idea popped into my head—I thought I might bag Kid Kidder——"

"I begin to see," commented Blake.

"Apparently the Kid didn't know the chauffeur well, and they were to meet here to-night," I continued. "I took a chance. I brought along a chauffeur's uniform and slipped into it. I don't know why I took such a foolish risk—but I wanted to do something unusual, and—and—well, I saw a man sneaking around the place, and I followed him. I had a pistol I had equipped myself with, and I felt fairly brave. I caught this man in the room"—I pointed out the false Kid Kidder—"and he admitted he was the famous crook."

"Him?" snorted the plain-clothes man. "Why, that's Pete Jones. He's a hophead, and light in the dome. Kidder—him! Oh, no!"

"Perhaps the chauffeur, who had been frightened, found a way to communicate with and warn the real Kid Kidder," put in Harold Blake.

"H'm!" grunted the heavy-necked limb of the law.

I had done my best, and I felt weak.

"How—how do you happen to be here?" I asked, turning to Mr. Blake.

"Why, it seems," answered Harold, "that the officer here, Mr. Keirnan, after having a long talk with Mrs. Burbecker, suspected Gung Dhas of designs on the Burbecker idol. Dhas belongs to an Eastern tribe who prize this stone highly, and he was doubtless entrusted with the mission of getting it back. Keirnan watched him this evening, and pressed me into service to help him. He came up from the outside, and I took the inside. We didn't expect to find so many, but, under the circumstances, it is easily explained."

Indeed, it was not easily explained, I reflected.

"Well, I guess I'll take this hophead and the Hindu to the jug," said Keirnan. "What about the dame?"

"I will look after Miss Drew, Keirnan," Harold said coldly, and I loved him for the tone. "Let's make our way quietly down the stairs." He whispered in my ear: "A few words with you privately, Miss Drew."

Twenty minutes later, Harold Blake

and I were alone in the moonlight. I had managed to get back into my own clothes without any one save the two or three directly concerned being the wiser.

Harold Blake had his arms about me, but there was something stern in his eyes.

"You foolish little fibber!" he chided. "All the time I knew you were falsifying. You are the famed Kid Kidder, who has set the town by the ears. I have learned that in the few days I have worked on the case. You see, my name is not Harold Blake, but Locksley Darrell. The papers didn't mention until to-day that I was coming, but I have been here for several days; and while you may have been lucky enough to fool the Amoca coppers, I was not deceived. You left traces, little girl.

"But you are not going to burn your fingers any more, Marilynn. You should have learned a lesson. I hope you have. For I—I like you a little better than any criminal I have ever encountered, and I don't want you to be one any longer, my dear. You must return all the things you have taken, Marilynn."

I hate tears, yet I was crying softly on his shoulder. It was a nice place to cry, I found.

"And now," said this remarkable and impetuous young man, "you must be punished. All wrongdoers must take their medicine. Your sentence will be for life, for you need a good detective to look after you, little Marilynn."

He kissed me; and then I wondered why I had ever been thrilled by thievery.

Incidentally, Kid Kidder is still one of the great unsolved mysteries of our town; and as far as I am concerned, it will always be thus.

FINGER PRINTS HIDDEN WITH COLLODION

SO daring and successful have been the operations of burglars in the wholesale sections of New York during the past months that burglar insurance companies, which raised their rates only a few months ago, will consider a further increase unless conditions improve. A partial list of such burglaries compiled by the insurance companies contains the names of fifteen firms whose individual losses ranged from about four thousand dollars to twenty-five thousand dollars.

The thieves are burglars of the commercial rather than the scientific or artistic type. They are not connoisseurs in gems; they do not pride themselves upon a "slick job." But with block and tackle, saw, mallet, chisel, and possibly even a pickax, they get there just the same. Silks and furs and women's wear they know, and, heedless of the bulk of their plunder, they load it into a freight elevator, trundle it out on hand trucks, and cart it away.

In just one point they look to science—the matter of finger prints. Convinced that that method of identification has a sound scientific basis, the rough-and-ready loft burglars coat their finger tips with collodion before they set to work, and the burglar insurance companies have a neatly labeled collection of empty bottles which were picked up on looted premises.

The almost invariable presence of the collodion bottle and other circumstances have convinced the insurance companies that the burglaries are the work of a single gang. The usual method is to gain entrance by a skylight or by swinging from the roof on a rope to the level of the desired window. Once inside, the burglars collect their plunder and then proceed to cut their way to the street. Nothing stays their progress. If an iron-sheathed door defies their saws and chisels, they have been known to tunnel through a fireproof wall.

A Bag of Chains

by George C. Jenks

A HEAVY chair fell over with a crash.

The woman listening at the other side of the portières tore them apart to look. Then, as she saw that the upsetting of the chair was merely an accident, she let them drop back again. The two men in the other room had not seen her.

It was Dave Harrison who had knocked the chair over. It had happened when, with desperation deepening the lines of worry in his pale face and narrowing the pupils of his pathetically sunken eyes, he had suddenly started forward to bring his fist down on the library table in front of his coldly attentive father-in-law.

"I tell you, Mr. Clay, you've *got* to give it to me!"

Wynne Clay's hard mouth tightened. He would not have been the millionaire he was, if he had ever permitted people to dictate to him.

"I've just told you I won't," he said roughly. "And now that that's settled, if you'll excuse me, I'm busy."

He swung around to the open safe behind him, and, without seeming to care whether Dave Harrison was watching him or not, took out four packages of bank notes, each marked "$5,000," and put them in a leather hand bag.

Harrison knew that this money was for the pay roll at the Clay factory. He had been Wynne Clay's secretary and cashier up to eighteen months before, and one of his regular duties had been to come for the leather bag every week. Generally he had returned to the factory in his employer's smart motor car, with Wynne himself at the wheel, and the chauffeur in the back seat.

Going so frequently to the big Clay home among the trees in the fashionable suburb, it was not long before Dave got to know Estelle, Wynne Clay's only child. But he might not have mustered up courage when he did, to tell Wynne that he wanted to marry Estelle, and that she was willing, had it not been that the millionaire himself had married for the second time a few months previously, and that Estelle found it difficult to get along with her stepmother. Anyhow, when Wynne Clay's answer to Dave was to discharge him forthwith—and none too politely at that—Estelle went, too, and became Mrs. David Harrison.

Some people said that the new Mrs. Wynne Clay—a forceful sort of woman—was jealous of Estelle, and that it was she who influenced her bullheaded husband to swear he never would look on his daughter's face again, and that he would ruin Dave Harrison.

"You really mean, Mr. Clay, that you won't give me the reference?" There was something of menace in Dave Harrison's tones.

"Hello!" growled the millionaire, looking around, with the leather bag in his hand. "Haven't you gone yet?"

"I can't get this situation of cashier without your indorsement, Mr. Clay," pleaded Dave brokenly. "And it means so much to me—and Estelle. I haven't earned a dollar for three months now, and it took all I had saved when—when

the baby came. The stores have shut down on us, and we—we are actually starving. Estelle is sick, and——" His voice suddenly arose almost to a shriek. "I tell you, Mr. Clay, you *must* give me that note—for Estelle's sake."

"Your wife is nothing to me," was the snarling rejoinder.

The expression in Dave Harrison's haggard face as Wynne Clay pointed angrily to the door was not pleasant to see. Then, with a hungry look at the leather bag which made the millionaire involuntarily clutch it tighter, he went out.

Hardly had the door closed when the portières separating the library from the room beyond were swept apart, and a large, gorgeously appareled middle-aged matron came in, smiling benevolently.

"I thought I heard somebody talking to you when I came into the other room," she purred. "But I see I was mistaken. Wynne, dear, would you mind——"

"It was that scoundrel, Harrison," interrupted her husband. "I don't know how he got into the house, when I'd given orders that I wouldn't see him. Our servants aren't worth their salt, it seems to me. As for Harrison, I believe he meant to make a grab for this money, only his nerve failed him. He knew I would be getting ready to take the cash for the pay roll to the factory this morning."

"Poor Estelle!" ejaculated Mrs. Wynne Clay, raising her prominent eyes and two fat, bediamonded hands simultaneously. "She is paying dearly for her foolish marriage."

"Ugh!" grunted Wynne Clay. "What were you going to ask me just now, my —my dear?"

"I wanted to go to town for some shopping. I thought you might be willing to drive me down in your car, and pick me up at my dressmaker's when you come home. You haven't engaged a new chauffeur yet, in place of Collins, have you?"

"No; I'll see about it to-day. Collins was a good man about a car, but he was such a drunken, lying rascal I couldn't keep him. Two weeks was all I could stand of him. I suppose the next one I get will be sober and absolutely straight—and a pinhead. There's always something wrong with people I pay wages to. Yes, all right. I'll drive you down. Be ready in half an hour. I have to repair the carburetor, put on two new tires, and oil up all around. Confound that Collins!"

Mrs. Wynne Clay went to her room to prepare for her shopping trip, and her husband, bag in hand, stalked away to his neat cement garage, only large enough for the car he always used and the limousine he had bought for his wife just after their wedding.

It was a little chilly on this spring morning, and he closed the door before he began to work about his machine.

"Jessie!" called Mrs. Wynne Clay, to her maid, when she had finished dressing and was sitting before her mirror, putting on her gloves and surveying herself complacently in her new toque. "Look out of the window and see whether the car has come around to the front door."

"Not yet, ma'am," reported Jessie, a round-eyed, emphatic young person, who took a warm interest in everything that came within her sphere of observation. "But there's Doctor Strong, from next door, going up our drive to the garage. He's running."

"Going to speak to Mr. Clay, and hurrying to catch him before he comes out," was Mrs. Wynne Clay's calm interpretation.

"Perhaps so, ma'am, but——"

Jessie broke off and ran out to a window in the hall which gave upon the extensive grounds of the Clay residence, with a view of the garage and

the thick shrubbery on either side of the drive.

"Oh, Mrs. Clay!" she screamed. "There's something the matter! They are trying to burst open the garage door! It's that young man who was in the library with Mr. Clay."

Hardly had the maid's frightened face appeared in the bedroom when Mrs. Wynne Clay, suddenly excited, pushed her aside and ran down the broad staircase. She and Jessie reached the garage together.

"What is it, doctor?" panted Mrs. Clay. "What is that man doing at the garage door? He has no business here!"

She shot an indignant look at Dave Harrison, who was feverishly trying to force open the locked door with hand and knee.

"Yes, what *are* you doing here?" demanded Doctor Strong.

"I've heard the engine running for nearly half an hour," said Dave, as if that were explanation enough.

"You have?" shot out Doctor Strong suspiciously. "How was that? What were you doing behind those bushes? And why did you try to hide when you knew I saw you?"

"I did not try to hide," was Dave Harrison's indignant rejoinder. "I want to speak to Mr. Clay, and when he did not come out for so long after starting his motor, I determined to knock at the door."

"Ah!"

Doctor Kenneth Strong was a police surgeon, and he absorbed the atmosphere of suspicion that everybody breathes at headquarters. He banged hard at the garage door, but always with one eye on Dave Harrison.

"Give me a hand here, will you?" snapped the doctor. "The two of us ought to get through."

The doctor saw—or thought he saw—a look of fear in the eyes of the young man as he glanced over his shoulder, seeming to seek some way of escape. Then the two hurled themselves at the door together, and it fell open, tearing the lock away.

A rush of gaseous vapor met them, and as they hastily backed away from the open doorway, they saw, through the blue haze, that somebody lay motionless under the throbbing car.

It was Wynne Clay!

Doctor Strong, stooping low, darted into the garage and stopped the engine. He was outside again instantly, coughing, to grasp Dave Harrison by the arm, while he said, in a calm, professional tone to Mrs. Clay: "Please control yourself. We do not know that he is dead. The fact of his being on the floor gives hope. The gas from the exhaust, monoxide of carbon, is dangerous, but it rises rapidly, and Mr. Clay may not have breathed very much. I am surprised that he should have been caught. There have been several accidents of this kind lately, and people are becoming careful to leave their garage doors open when they warm up their motors."

A policeman, walking his beat, came rapidly down the driveway and saluted.

"Hello, Rodgers!" was Doctor Strong's acknowledgment. "Keep your eyes on this man while I go inside."

"Arrest him?" asked Rodgers phlegmatically.

"Not yet. But don't let him get away."

Rodgers stepped up to Dave and grunted "Get that?" while Strong pulled the limp form from beneath the car and unbuttoned the long linen coat which Wynne Clay kept for use in tinkering about his automobile. A professional hand over the heart for a full minute, followed by the pushing up of one of the eyelids, satisfied the doctor that life was gone. Then he looked a little further, and came out with a stony face that told nothing except that the millionaire was in a bad way.

"Doctor!" shrieked Mrs. Clay, clinging to his arm. "Is he dead?"

"I'm not sure," lied Strong. "I am going to make a closer examination."

"If he is dead, then that man, David Harrison, killed him," she continued wildly, pointing a trembling, jeweled finger at Dave. "I heard him threatening my husband in his library not more than half an hour ago. He wanted money, I think, and when Mr. Clay wouldn't give it to him, he shouted that he *would* have it, or something to that effect, and he had to be turned out of the house."

Doctor Strong's brows knitted thoughtfully. "Do you know where Mr. Clay was going in his machine?" he asked, with seeming irrelevance.

"Yes, to the factory. He was taking the cash for the pay roll, as he does every week," was the tearful answer. Then, in sudden excitement, she went on hysterically: "See if his black leather bag is in the car? He brought it out with him. It contained about twenty thousand dollars, I know. If ——"

Before she could finish her sentence, Doctor Strong was in the garage, searching swiftly, but methodically, in and around the car, for the black bag.

"Mrs. Clay," he called out abruptly, "will you oblige me by going into the house for ten minutes?"

"But, my husband!" she protested, weeping. Then she added in more collected but anxious tones: "And the money?"

"I will report to you as soon as I have investigated," answered the doctor, rather impatiently. "Please pardon me if I say I can do better if I am free from all distraction." He came out of the garage, to place a soothing hand on her arm. "Believe me, it will be better for you, too. Please go."

He motioned significantly to Jessie, and as the maid led her half-frantic mistress away, swung around to Dave. Looking the young man straight in the eyes, he said, slowly and distinctly: "Mr. Clay was not suffocated by gas. You were in that garage. What were you doing there?"

"What makes you think I was in there?" fenced Dave.

"I do not think. I *know* it," was the stern reply. "Bring him into the garage, Rodgers."

But Dave Harrison eluded the policeman and was in the little building before he could be pushed in as a prisoner. Rodgers showed no resentment. So long as his man did not try to escape, it was all the same to him. He pulled the door shut when the three were inside.

"Now, Mr. David Harrison," said the doctor composedly. "I will show you how I know you were in this place, and why I believe you killed this man and stole the leather bag."

Rodgers looked at Strong in saturnine admiration. The live young police surgeon had found the heart of several crime mysteries since he had been connected with the department. He said he liked the game.

"You say you were not in the garage." The doctor pointed a finger suddenly at Harrison. "Why——"

"I did not say so," interrupted Dave, breathing hard. "I asked you why you thought I was."

"And I told you I knew it. Go on."

"I *was* in here, before I went into the house, where I saw and talked to Mr. Clay," answered Dave, still breathless. "I had to see him, but I knew he had given orders that I was not to be admitted. I had been refused entrance before. You know that my wife is Wynne Clay's daughter?"

The doctor nodded and shrugged his shoulders. "Everybody around here knows all about that," he answered. "But that gave you no right to be in his garage. Your own explanation doesn't help you much."

"I thought I could get him on his private telephone, but it is out of order," continued Dave, as if the doctor hadn't spoken. "You can try it. There it is."

He pointed to the instrument against the wall, but the doctor did not offer to touch it. Instead, he seized one of Dave Harrison's hands and held open the fingers with an iron grip.

"Rodgers, pick up that bag behind the car, on the floor."

"Ah, you've found the black bag, then?" cried Dave eagerly.

"Hardly!" sneered Strong, as he took from Rodgers a greasy canvas bag, very different from the handsome black leather receptacle in which Wynne Clay had carried his pay-roll cash. "This is a bag of tire chains, and"—with a sudden jerk he twisted Dave to his knees beside the dead body of the millionaire —*"it was with this bag that you killed him!"*

"Killed him?" gasped Dave. "Why, I——"

"Don't lie, Harrison!" thundered the doctor. "Look here! See the grease on this bag, and look at your hands! Rodgers, you look! You see there is the same kind of grease on his fingers. More than that, here are impressions of the chains showing on the palms of his hands. They would show on any hands that had held the bag tightly. Now you see how I knew that you'd been in the garage."

"I don't deny that," broke in Dave, the perspiration standing out on his face. "But I didn't kill Mr. Clay."

The doctor frowned and uttered a scornful grunt ere he made the stern rejoinder: "Wynne Clay was killed with that chain bag, and you have had the bag in your hands."

"He was killed by the gas from his car," interrupted Dave.

"I've told you he wasn't," snapped Strong. "Look here! Hold him, Rodgers, but let him look."

Releasing Dave's wrist, as Rodgers placed a heavy hand on the young man's shoulder, Strong turned the head of the dead Wynne Clay so that the back of it was toward the light, and moved the gray hair aside with a cool professional finger. A slight cut, with a large, spreading blue area, was revealed.

"Almost the same kind of mark that would be made by a sandbag," commented the doctor. "It was a heavy blow, and Mr. Clay's heart was not good, so it killed him. As for the gas, that was a trick to hide the crime, of course," he added contemptuously. "Here is a hose leading from the exhaust to this hole in the wall of the garage, so that the vapor would be carried to the outside, but it has been disconnected from the car. Pretty smart, I suppose you thought it, but it wouldn't deceive a child."

Dave Harrison had been staring in horrified bewilderment at the gray head close to his knees, seemingly overcome by the confident, pitiless arraignment. Suddenly, with a desperate lunge, he sprang to his feet, and, his back against the wall, poured out his defense in a strained, high voice, the words tumbling over each other in a torrent of indignant denial.

"You are jumping to conclusions," he shouted, "backed by what I suppose you consider sound circumstantial evidence. Now let me tell you just what happened so far as I am concerned."

"Go ahead!" returned the doctor, with a sardonic smile. "But I warn you I haven't brought out all my evidence yet."

Dave winced, but, recovering himself immediately, he challenged through his set teeth: "Bring it out, then. Give me a fighting chance to prove my innocence. What is this other evidence?"

"Finger prints," was the curt reply. "They are on the car door, as well as on Mr. Clay's white collar. You may

have tried to throttle him before you used the chain bag. I haven't compared the prints with yours yet, but——"

"You needn't take the trouble," broke in Dave. "They *are* mine. Before I got in to see Mr. Clay in his house I tried the telephone, as I've told you. When that failed, I determined to send him a note, asking him to see me. I had no paper, and I took a sheet from the car pocket, where I knew Mr. Clay always kept some."

"Where is the note?" interrupted Strong.

"It is destroyed," explained Dave. "The footman at the house would not take it, and I tore it to scraps and scattered them as I walked down the avenue, thinking what I should do next. Ten minutes later I went back to the house. I had seen the footman go out, and I thought I might have better luck with another. Mr. Clay often changes his servants, and there was a new man on the door, who let me in. After I had had a talk with Mr. Clay——"

"A satisfactory talk?" interjected Strong cynically.

"No."

"He turned you out of the house, didn't he?"

"I went out."

"Ah! Go on."

"It was imperative that I should get a reference from Mr. Clay—life-and-death imperative—and I resolved to see him again somehow. I knew his regular habits, and that he would soon be in the garage. So I stood back in the shrubbery. When he had gone in, I followed. He must have expected me to try to see him, for he would not listen, but ordered me off his premises. More than that, he tried to throw me out of the garage. I put up my hands to defend myself——"

"Struck him?" asked the doctor suspiciously.

"No, my hands were open, as the marks on his collar show. I went out, and stood behind the bushes, determined to speak to him as he came out, because I *must* have that situation somehow——"

"Come to the point," barked Strong. "When you came out of the garage, as you say, you went back and killed him, didn't you?"

Doctor Strong had often seen the "third degree" applied at headquarters, and he knew the methods. He scowled menacingly at Dave.

"I have told you all," returned the young man wearily. "I was waiting in the shrubbery when I heard the engine start, and, after a while, I saw that the blue smoke had ceased to come from the vent hole in the wall, although the motor was still running. Then I tried to open the door, and you came, and——"

"You found you couldn't get away, so you decided to bluff it out by pretending you were trying to save Mr. Clay from the gas," interrupted the doctor. "You figured that you could make your get-away while we were working to bring him around. The scheme was so good that I guess you can't understand why it didn't work." Strong suddenly dropped his half-bantering tone and thundered: "Where have you hidden that leather bag and the money?"

For an instant Dave Harrison stared vacantly at his interlocutor. Then his eyes roved, seemingly without aim, about the garage and up to the wooden ceiling, until, with an inarticulate shriek, he broke away from Rodgers and dashed around the car. The next moment he was in a corner, climbing the wall like a cat.

"After him, Rodgers!" bellowed Strong. "What kind of game is this?"

Rodgers was a good policeman, but it was the agile young doctor who first sprang up the perpendicular ladder, formed of small slats nailed to a single

upright which, in the shadowy corner, might be easily overlooked.

Just as Dave pushed aside a partly open trapdoor in the ceiling and disappeared, the doctor was at his heels, yelling down to Rodgers to bring up the flash lamp which was part of the equipment of the car, and lay on the front seat.

It was not until the doctor had the electric torch in his hand and flashed the light into the blackness of the loft, that Dave Harrison cried hysterically:

"Look! There's your black leather bag, and—here is the man who killed Wynne Clay!"

Stretched across the floor, his head near the trapdoor, and the black leather bag, the twenty thousand dollars still in it, clasped in his arms, was the dead body of a man apparently about thirty years of age, whose awful purple face and glaring eyeballs told the experienced physician that he had been poisoned by the deadly carbon monoxide gas.

"Collins!" gasped Doctor Strong. "Wynne Clay's chauffeur!"

As the doctor said afterward, when he and Mrs. Clay, with Dave Harrison and Rodgers, were all in the library, from which Dave had been ordered out so short a time before, it was clear enough now, Collins, no doubt half drunk, had been in hiding in the garage, intending to steal the money which, as an employe of Wynne Clay, he knew all about. He might have been there since before daylight.

"I guess he was," boomed Rodgers. "He was a slick one. I know *him*."

"He waited until Mr. Clay came in and was busy about his car," continued Doctor Strong. "Then, under cover of the noise of the engine, after Harrison had gone out, he struck Mr. Clay over the head with the bag of chains, and kicked the hose off the exhaust pipe of the car, so that it would seem as if gas were the cause of death. Then he went up into the loft to wait for a chance to escape with the goods. Like most criminals, he overlooked one little thing. That was the fact that there are a lot of holes bored in the floor of the loft, to ventilate the garage below. Of course, the gas got him before he could get down. But, see here, Harrison, how did you come to guess he was up there?" asked the doctor patronizingly. "It seems to me you must have some detective ability to hit on that."

"I saw there was wet grease on some of the slats of the ladder—the same kind of grease as is on the floor of the garage and smeared on the chain bag. I don't think a man had to be a great detective to figure that somebody had climbed the ladder lately," replied Dave Harrison dryly. "Then I knew I had not struck Mr. Clay, and naturally I was looking pretty hard for the man who did. That may have sharpened my wits a little."

POLICEMAN SUSPENDED AFTER THEFT

CHIEF YOUNG, of the St. Louis police, recently suspended Patrolman Christopher McDonald and Private Watchman William Major on neglect of duty charges pending investigation of the theft of brass castings from the storeroom of the Elliott & Barry Engineering Company, 212 North Fifteenth Street.

Detectives traced some of the brass to a secondhand store at Sixteenth and Olive Streets, where it was said that it had been sold by a saloon keeper. Major told Chief Young that he saw Patrolman McDonald take a sack of brass to the saloon keeper's place the morning after the robbery. McDonald said that he found the brass in an alley and temporarily left it at the saloon and forgot to make a report of the find.

Headquarters Chat

SO many requests have come to us from readers who wish to become detectives, and from other readers who desire information that will aid in guarding themselves or their property against criminals, that we have decided to inaugurate a department which will be conducted under the title,

EXPERT DETECTIVE ADVICE

Under the general supervision of the editors of this magazine, Gerard Luisi, whose stories have made him well known to the magazine-reading public, will have charge of this department. Mr. Luisi, who has been a detective for many years, and whose father followed the same calling, has shown himself not only an astute and clever detective, but also a man of great physical bravery. Perhaps his most notable display of courage was in the "Vogel Case," an account of which was published in an early issue of this magazine.

As "copy" has to go to the composing room some six weeks in advance of the date of publication, Mr. Luisi has written a series of articles that will be printed in the space under the heading of this new department, until it is well organized. Letters asking information will receive a personal reply if a stamp is inclosed, and also will be considered in the pages of the magazine; the names of the interested persons in the latter case will, of course, not be printed.

On another page of the chat in this issue you will find Mr. Luisi's first article. It is entitled "The Investigator."

Can you imagine a crime—a cold-blooded, deliberate murder—being committed by a man who has been dead for several days? Of course it's impossible, yet the infallible clew—the finger-print evidence—is convincing proof that such was the case. The novel in our next issue,

DEATH'S BRIDE

By HERMAN LANDON

is one of the creepiest, most ingenious, and most mystifying stories that this gifted author has written for us. Moreover, in Inspector Stapleton, he has drawn a remarkable detective character; one whose personality, we feel sure, will make a strong appeal. Inspector Stapleton is a detective who sympathizes with the frailty of human nature, but is, nevertheless, shrewd, keen, and observant to a degree far beyond the average investigator of crime.

Besides the second installment of "The Graven Cryptogram," Carolyn Wells' serial, which begins in this issue, next Tuesday's magazine will also contain further chapters of George Edgar's fascinating novel, "The Great Voldane," and a lively installment of Douglas Grey's story, "A Spinner of Death."

Anna Alice Chapin, who has made many notable contributions to the magazine—novels and serials as well as short stories, among which are the "Boston Betty" yarns—has written "Set Free," a short story of considerable

merit, for the next issue. It will also contain "The Evident Trail," by Johnston McCulley, who has the "Black Star" stories to his credit; "The Substitute Heir," another tale in the "Jonah" series, by Arthur P. Hankins; and several other short stories you will find to be rare treats.

UNDER THE LAMP

The ten names of operators on the wrong side of the law, the answer to the puzzle in last week's issue, follow:

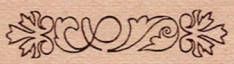
1. Badger. 2. Dip. 3. Garroter. 4. Gun moll. 5. Pennyweighter. 6. Hoister. 7. Peterman. 8. Scratcher. 9. Yeggman. 10. Vogel grafter

Kelly the Rat planned a robbery, and met his pal, Gyp Donegan, in a café to talk it over. They had no sooner begun than they spied a detective from headquarters at the next table, within earshot of all that would be said. As this was Kelly's last chance to see Gyp before the robbery, he did his best to make his plan known to his pal. The result was satisfactory, but the robbery was a failure through other circumstances beyond their control. However, to show Kelly he was "wise," Gyp sent him a message, confirming arrangements, which convinced Kelly that what he had told Gyp under his breath had been heard. In the message were the name and the address of the prospective victim, as well as the day and the hour the job was to be "pulled."

Here is the message. See if you can dope it out.

and stand taker
I lay be green hill thirty three dark twos.
past hear twenty a v

The answer will appear in next Tuesday's magazine.



EXPERT DETECTIVE ADVICE

CONDUCTED BY GERARD LUISI

TO those interested in the methods of detectives in tracking down their quarry, and to those desirous of knowing some of the tricks of criminals, in order that they may protect themselves, this department is intended to be of value.

The carelessness and gullibility of the majority of people is one of the biggest reasons for the success of so many burglaries and swindles, and it is my object to help the readers of the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE by exposing some of the swindles, and showing in what ways the average person, through carelessness, is at fault.

Many persons desirous of taking up the detective profession as a life work have written to me, asking for advice as to how to begin, and where to get the necessary knowledge and experience. All these questions, as well as other queries in regard to any of the numerous branches of detective work, will be answered in this department, free of charge; the department is, in fact, designed to help embryo detectives with the information they desire, and also to help those who have problems for which the advice of a detective is necessary.

In many instances something may be missed or stolen under such circumstances that the victim hesitates to call in a detective, and yet feels that the advice of a detective is absolutely indispensable if the missing or stolen articles are to be recovered. In such a case the victim has only to write to the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, and advice freely will be given him.

In any other circumstances about which a person is in doubt, and for some reason finds it inconvenient or impossible to obtain the services of a reliable detective, this magazine stands ready to help him.

There are many swindles well known to detectives which are absolutely new to and unheard of by the general public. As the average swindler is not a murderous-looking roughneck, but a gentlemanly appearing fellow, with a likable, convincing manner, it is more than likely that nine persons out of ten will fall victim to his schemes, unless warned of his game beforehand.

Besides schemes to swindle the public, there are schemes to blackmail it—schemes concocted by criminals with the special purpose of luring men and women into compromising positions, and then forcing them to pay by holding the fear of exposure over their heads. It is a well-known fact that there are criminals who obtain a steady income in this way, and since, as often as not, the blackmailer is in the so-called higher walks of life, the money he obtains from people of wealth and position is, as may be imagined, considerable. The cleverest man or woman may fall victim to a plot of this sort unless possessed of previous knowledge of such schemes.

The Investigator

THE old idea of a detective—a huge individual with a bulldog jaw, large hands, and feet encased in heavy, square-toed shoes, and possessing a dull wit—is long since exploded. Nowadays, the detective or investigator does not walk into a home with his hat on and a cigar stuck in his mouth. He knows enough to remove both; in fact, in the majority of cases he is a thorough gentleman. As far as appearances go, he might be a prosperous business man, a bank clerk, a doctor, a lawyer—anything, in fact, except a detective.

A great detective is born, not made. He may be trained in methods of following and circumventing criminals, but to begin with he must possess the detective mind, and keen powers of observation and deduction. The ability to detect crime and its perpetrators is a natural gift developed by experience and knowledge of the world, and of human nature. A detective must possess in a marked degree that sixth sense which we call intuition, and the results detectives sometimes arrive at through the promptings of their intuition are little short of marvelous.

A good investigator must be proficient in all branches of detective work. He should be an expert shadower, roper, et cetera; must understand all about finger prints and their photographing; and at the same time he must be able to conduct an open investigation and examine the witnesses of a crime in such a way as to bring to light the tiniest clew.

Every first-class investigator is possessed of a good practical knowledge of law, which, for obvious reasons, often stands him in good stead.

An investigator must have an excellent memory for faces, voices, figures, and personal characteristics. As a camera reproduces an exact likeness, so must the mind of a detective form a mental picture which is instantly recognized

whenever or wherever seen again. A face once seen, or a voice once heard, is always remembered.

The investigator must have infinite patience. He can never afford to lose it. He cannot conduct a good examination, cannot gain the confidence of those he is talking to, and lead them on to make admissions and give him the information he is after, if he loses his self-control. Loss of temper puts people on their guard, antagonizes them, and makes them suspicious. The investigator must keep cool and clear-headed, so that he may study the expressions of others, and draw his own conclusions.

A good detective never wastes time in starting his investigation. The sooner an investigation is begun after the crime is committed, the better. Just as a hound follows a fresh trail more quickly and easily than an old one, so can the trained man hunter follow the fresh trail of the criminal more quickly and more easily than when the criminal has been given time to cover his tracks. Delay in starting an investigation is often fatal.

An investigator does not confine himself to the scene of the crime, but his investigations and the resulting clews lead him, upon necessary occasion, all over the world. It doesn't matter how small a clew may be, a good investigator always runs it down. It may lead to nothing, and it may lead to the complete solution of a mystery.

Often an investigator goes hours, sometimes days, without food or sleep, in order to follow a clew. He never lets personal comfort or convenience stand in the way of his work. His is the master mind which must direct the activities of his assistants, his ropers, his shadowers, et cetera; his is the responsibility for success or failure.

An investigator must have an impartial mind. He must not let himself be influenced by prejudice for or against persons, by religion, or by nationality, et cetera. He must regard the facts for what they are worth, and work up the case from them.

The district attorney tries to convict, the lawyer for the defense works to save; but the investigator must seek always for the truth, no matter whether it convicts or saves.

MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to readers of the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE. Its purpose is to aid persons in getting in touch with others of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your own name in the notice, we will print it "blind" if you do not wish the publicity. You can also have the notice "double blind" if you prefer. This can be done by using nicknames or the mention of some odd incident. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward any letters that may come to you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that may seem to us unsuitable. We'll forward any mail that is sent us, but reserve the right to refuse to print any item that may seem objectionable to us.

Now, readers, help others as you, in your extremity, would like them to help you. The persons who have asked us to print the following notices are very anxious to get in touch with the ones they have mentioned. If you can assist them in doing so, lend a hand.

When you get in touch with the person you are seeking, please let us know, so we can take your notice out.

FRY, JAMES R., last heard of about three years ago while living in Hollywood, California. Has resided a number of years in Texas, and may have moved there. Any information concerning him will be received with gratitude by his brother, RUFUS M. FRY, of Middlesboro, Kentucky.

GARFIELD, SAMUEL, eighteen, medium height, brown hair, last seen in Brooklyn, New York, in 1913. His father was in the jewelry business. He is thought to have moved to Canada. Write your old friend, SAMUEL GLASS, in care of the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

VANDERBILT, JOSEPH VICTOR, who lived in Rochester, New York, in 1899, and was later thought to be somewhere in Virginia. Your daughter, MARY LOUISE, is anxious to hear from you. Address her at 290 Adams Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

WILL any one knowing the whereabouts of a middle-aged man, having the name J. T. Wiseman tattooed on his forearm, who was last heard of in Washington in 1917, please communicate with the Missing Department of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE?

CAMPBELL, JOHN W., formerly of Lynchburg, Virginia, who married Iola Sydnor, a native of North Carolina, in 1892. Please communicate with MRS. O. L. CAMPBELL, in care of News Stand, Union Station, Augusta, Georgia. If dead, will relatives please write?

GEORGE, WALTER, last heard of living with father and sister at Rochester, New York. Please communicate with your sister, MARTINA—MRS. A. F. HARENCKI, 3000 Bigelow Boulevard, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

CAN any one furnish information as to relatives of a little girl, thought to be the daughter of James Doloff. Thirty-two years ago she was given into the care of a family by the name of Lord, somewhere in the vicinity of Lowell, Massachusetts. Her mother was a weaver in a cotton mill. Address Missing Department, in care of this magazine.

SANFORD, WILLIAM H., forty, light complected; last heard of in Memphis, Tennessee, about seventeen years ago. He used to live at Guthrie Center, Iowa. Your brother George is in the army. Mother worries of you and him. It is too much for her. Your sisters, Cora and Creasie, are married now. Let us hear from you. Mrs. C. HEADLEE, R. R. 4, No. 12A, Guthrie Center, Iowa.

HEENING (or Heain), WILLIAM: Some one who has not heard of you since you were about three years old, and who had been interested in you since you were born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, is very anxious to know what became of you, and to hear from you. Please address Missing Department, in care of the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

NESBITT, SERGEANT GEORGE O., five feet ten inches tall, dark complexion, has black hair and dark eyes; was last heard from while in camp at Fort Bliss, Texas, in August, 1916. Please address any information regarding him to his brother, HARRY NESBIT, R. D. 2, Anaheim, California.

COLE, WILLIAM, twenty-six years old, dark hair and dark eyes. Your sister EDNA would like to hear from you. Write her in care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

SMITH, JAMES, who was formerly employed in a spark-plug factory somewhere in Pennsylvania.—Jim: Why did you not wait for me? I had to get out. How can you stay away? Send for me or write and let me know where you are, and I will come.—M. S.

ANY one knowing the whereabouts of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Dent, having a son Carl and a daughter Ruby, last heard of at Portland, Oregon, in 1915, will confer a favor by communicating with their nephew and cousin, WILLIAM DENT, at Marked Tree, Arkansas.

EVANS, RADCLIFFE.—I know a few things to your advantage. Expect to be discharged soon. Write your old friend, BUMER, in care of this magazine.

TAYLOR, CHARLES O., formerly a sergeant in D Company, Seventeenth Regiment. Last heard of when discharged from Presidio Hospital, San Francisco, California. Any information as to his whereabouts, to be used in his interest, would be appreciated if addressed to Box 121, Mt. Vernon, Ohio.

BOALS.—If you should see this and intend to make a change, go to O. I wrote him, and he will assist you all he can. He is stopping at hotel same name as the town. All are well.—E. V. J.

WILL C. T. D. GALBRAITH, who was heard of last in Portland, Oregon, between 1889 and 1894, please write MAC-R. KYLE, Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

JENSEN, PETER A., a native of Denmark; forty-four; about six feet tall, weighing one hundred and forty pounds, and having dark-brown hair and blue eyes; last heard of when he left his home in Boston, in June, 1917, to work in a lumber camp somewhere in Maine. Your wife and daughter, GERTRUDE LOUISE, are very anxious to hear from you. Address them at 1734 Washington Street, or in care of the Missing Department of this magazine.

TURNER, GEORGE W., forty-eight, five feet three inches tall; has brown hair, turned gray, and brown eyes. Nothing has been heard of him since he left his home in Cleveland, Ohio. Any information concerning his present whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by his children. Address Missing Department, in care of this magazine.

BARRY, PATRICK and MICHAEL, sons of the late Patrick and Ellen Barry, who left Ireland some years ago, and are thought to have settled somewhere in the West. Michael married Catherine Cronan, and had one son, Richard, when last heard from, about forty years ago. Please send any information concerning them to a friend, in care of the Missing Department.

PETERS, WESLEY W., last heard from in Tennessee, somewhere near the Virginia line. Write to your daughter PEARL. She is anxious to hear from you. Her address is P. O. Box 871, Drumright, Oklahoma.